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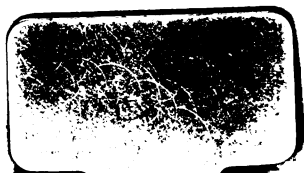
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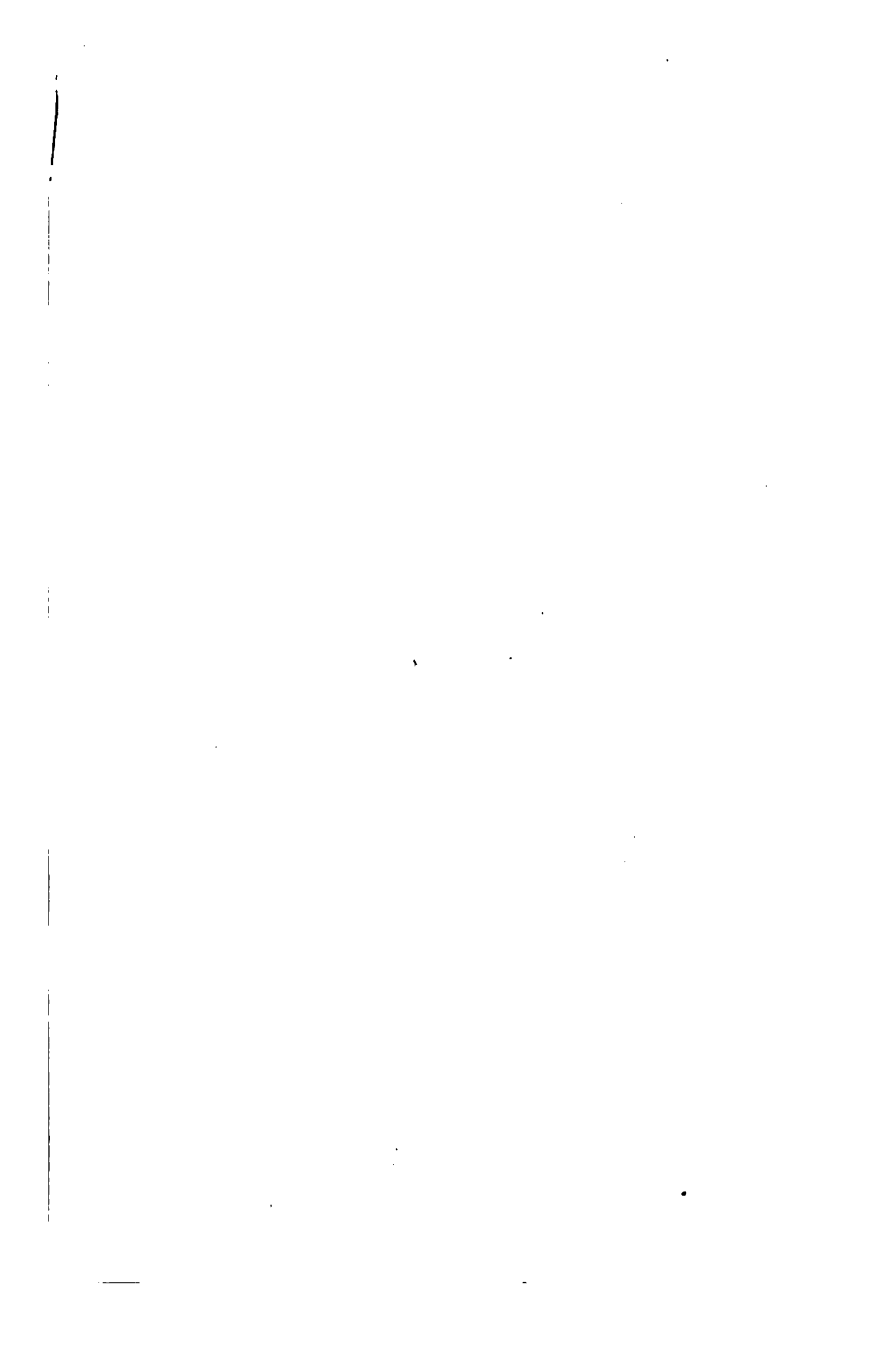
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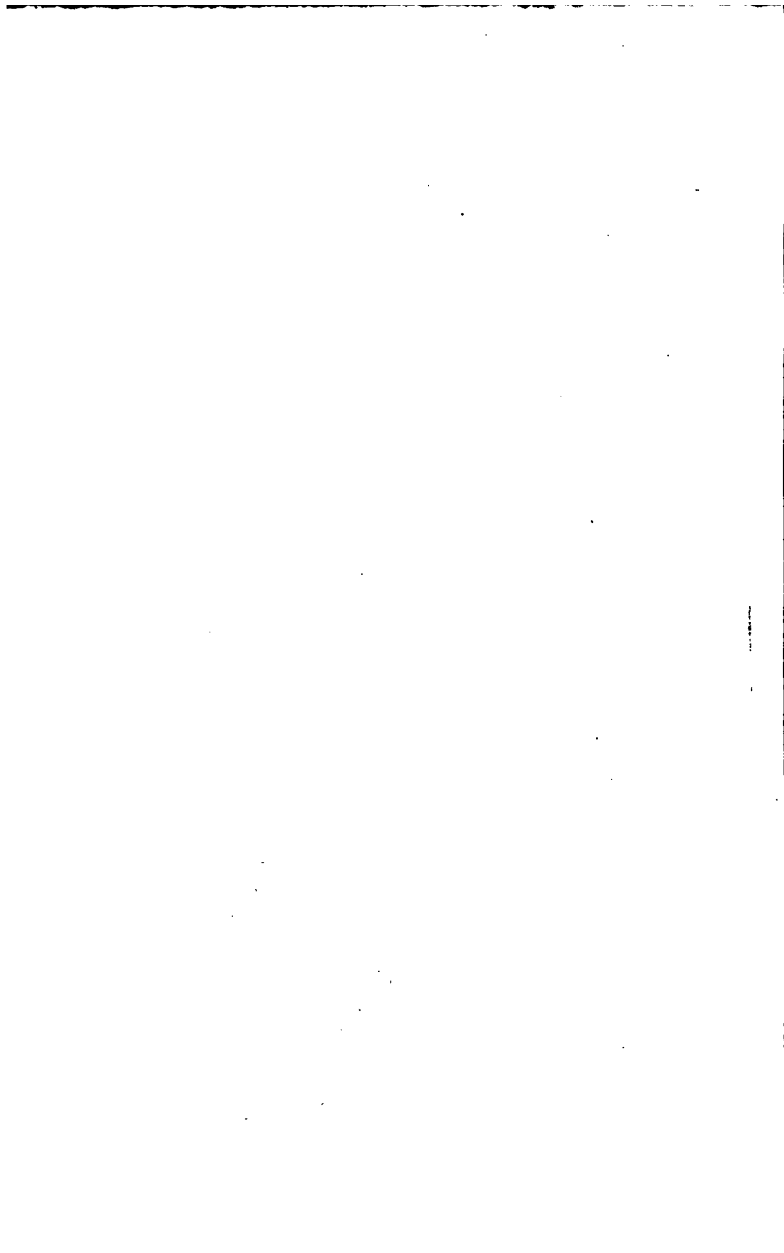
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HISTORICAL NOTICES  
OF THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISIONS IN SCOTLAND.



HISTORICAL NOTICES  
OF THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISIONS IN SCOTLAND:  
WITH  
SUGGESTIONS FOR RE-UNION.

BY  
BENJAMIN LAING, D.D.,  
COLMONELL.

"Without all controversy, the main inlet of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world, hath been by adding other conditions of communion than Christ hath done."—  
STILLINGFLEET.



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## PREFACE.

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THE mutual relations of the several sections of the church of Christ, and more especially of the four Presbyterian bodies in Scotland, out of the Establishment, are of a most unsatisfactory character. This is felt to be the case, and the feeling is, I believe, daily widening and deepening among both the members and ministers of all these bodies.

These sections of the church are all free from state control, they have all the same form of government, they hold in common a broad basis of gospel truth, and yet they are all separate from one another ; and some of them hold no more ecclesiastical fellowship with their Protestant Presbyterian brethren, than they do with the Church of Rome. This is surely not as it ought to be.

All who intelligently and seriously examine the present state of the church, and consider the great changes that have recently taken place, and those that are evidently in progress, must, I think, feel persuaded, that

the whole subject of terms of ecclesiastical fellowship, and of union and intercourse among the churches, must undergo a thorough revision. This is the age of revolutions, not of kingdoms merely, but of churches and of opinions on all subjects. God is shaking, not the earth only, but also the heavens. All creeds and confessions, canons and constitutions, must be sifted; that those things that can be shaken may be removed, and that those that cannot be shaken may remain.

In our investigations, we must go deeper down than those have generally done who have written on union. We must go down to the constitution of the Christian church, ascertain what that constitution is, and what are warrantable grounds of separation, and what are not; and then examine to which of these classes our points of difference belong.

In the following essay, there is a feeble attempt to approach the philosophy of the subject, to discover and exhibit the first principles on which ecclesiastical fellowship is to be maintained.

I have been engaged in the formation of two unions—that between the Constitutional Presbytery and the Associate Synod, in 1827, forming the Synod of Original Seceders; and that between the Synod of Original Seceders and the Synod of Original Burghers, in 1842, forming the Synod of United Original Seceders. I have been also, for some years, a member of the joint committees for union between the Reformed Presbyterian and the Original Secession churches. For some

time past, I have been led to suspect that in forming the unions we have effected, and in the negotiations in which we have been recently engaged, we have not been proceeding on sound and scientific principles. The parties uniting seem to me to be *driving a bargain*—each labouring to have apparent in the basis as much as possible of their peculiar sentiments. Now, it occurred to me, that the duty of uniting does not depend entirely or exclusively on the number of points on which the parties may happen to be of one mind; but that it might have been our duty to have united though the common ground had been much narrower than it actually was.

When two parties unite on a very extended and complicated basis, this, unless afterwards altered and modified, may prove an insurmountable obstacle to farther unions. The principles on which the churches are to be united must be simple, comprehensive, universal, and permanent.

In particular, I felt persuaded, that the Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Seceders had put the *Testimony* in a wrong place, in the machinery of ecclesiastical politics; and hence, instead of gaining the great end which the church's testimony is designed to accomplish, it had, moving in this false position, contributed eminently to rend and fracture the church. Accordingly, I have endeavoured to point out the place which, according to the constitution of the church, the *Testimony* ought, in my opinion, to occupy, and the

mode in which its operations are to be conducted, so as to preserve the union of the church, and, at the same time, to assert and vindicate the truth.

We have been born in an age of ecclesiastical division. We have lived from our childhood among parties holding a large amount of evangelical truth in common, and yet separated on certain peculiar principles; hence, when we thought of joining the church, or of entering the ministry, the only question which engaged our attention was—"By which of these parties are those principles held, which are most in accordance with our own views of Divine truth?" And we made our choice according as we decided this question. But there is another question which has never been thoroughly and satisfactorily discussed, and to the discussion of which we must now address ourselves. And the question is this, "Are the points of difference scriptural and warrantable grounds of division?"

This is the grand point to which my investigations in the following pages are directed. I am well aware that the views I have propounded are not in accordance with those of some of my brethren in all the bodies, the union of which I am so desirous to see accomplished. I do not, however, anticipate that what I have advanced will give rise to any feelings of an acrimonious character; for, though not universally, it is now generally admitted, that angry discussion is not at all necessary, and does not in the least contribute to the investigation and discovery of truth.

I give my brethren who differ from me full credit for sincerity, and for the purest and most ardent zeal for God, and for his truth. But I claim the same charity for myself. I claim to be held by them as being equally sincere, and equally pure and ardent in my zeal, with themselves. The difference between us, then, is merely a difference of judgment, or, let them say, an error of judgment on my part. And how is a difference or an error of judgment to be rectified? By kind and courteous treatment, and by clear and conclusive reasoning. Were a friend and I, in working some complex arithmetical question, to bring out each a different result, how in this case would we proceed? We would examine both operations coolly and cautiously, endeavour to ascertain if any error had been committed in the statement of the question—if any figure misplaced—any mistake in addition or subtraction; and if thousands of pounds depended on the accuracy of the result, so much the more need for coolness and caution. Let us proceed in this spirit with the ecclesiastical questions before us; and, seeing that these questions involve the interests of truth, the glory of God, and the welfare of the church, let us feel more imperatively the necessity for calmness and candour in our investigations.

I have been repeatedly told, that my views on ecclesiastical union are absurd and extravagant. But granting them to be so, their publication may not be altogether useless. The subserviency of extreme and extravagant opinions to the discovery and establishment

of truth, has been acknowledged by the best and the greatest of men. The late Professor Bruce of Whitburn has said, "Better a thousand useless or delicate questions should be canvassed, a thousand erroneous opinions tolerated, a thousand bold and dangerous propositions vented, than that one necessary and salutary truth should be suppressed." He has said, moreover, "It must be conducive to the information and improvement of any society, as well as of mankind at large, that men of a free spirit and enlarged views, accustomed to speculative studies and deep reflection, detached from the ties of party, disentangled from the perpetual bustle and the narrow routine of official duty, as well as raised above the prejudices and contracted sentiments of the commonalty, should have free access to the public mind, and impart without fear the results of their researches, reflections, and observation. On subjects interesting to the public, a more full communication of sentiments should be invited, and the most unfettered discussion encouraged, that, on reasonable grounds, they may appear worthy of being adopted or rejected.

Milton has said, "There is no learned man but will confess he hath much profited by reading controversies—his senses awakened, his judgment sharpened. If, then, it be profitable for him to read, why should it not at least be allowable for his adversary to write?"

Bentham has said, "He who thinks, and thinks for himself, will always have a claim to thanks; it is no

matter whether it be right or wrong, so as it be explicit. If it is right, it will serve as a guide to direct ; if wrong, as a beacon to warn."

Hume has said, "The greatest part of mankind may be divided into two classes ; that of *shallow* thinkers, who fall short of the truth, and that of *abstruse* thinkers, who go beyond it. The latter class are by far the most uncommon, and I may add, by far the most useful and valuable. They suggest hints, at least, and start difficulties which they want, perhaps, skill to pursue, but which may produce very fine discoveries, when handled by men who have a more just way of thinking."

If this attempt, then, shall be the means of calling the attention of the parties to a subject confessedly of vast importance, and of exciting those who are qualified for the task to take it up in deep earnest, and treat it in a manner worthy of its acknowledged importance, I shall have my reward.

It is certainly very gratifying to the Christian mind to see, in the present day, the friends of the Redeemer coming forth so boldly, and labouring with such intelligence, energy, and perseverance in defence of Protestantism, of the Sabbath, and of temperance ; and in promoting various deeply interesting schemes of Christian benevolence ; and why should they not be equally zealous and persevering in the great cause of ecclesiastical union. Something, no doubt, is being done in this cause, but much more ought certainly to be done. We

should have a Periodical devoted exclusively to the cause of union. This would give an opportunity for expounding principles, proposing plans, stating and removing difficulties, &c. Public meetings might also be held from time to time throughout the country for all these purposes.

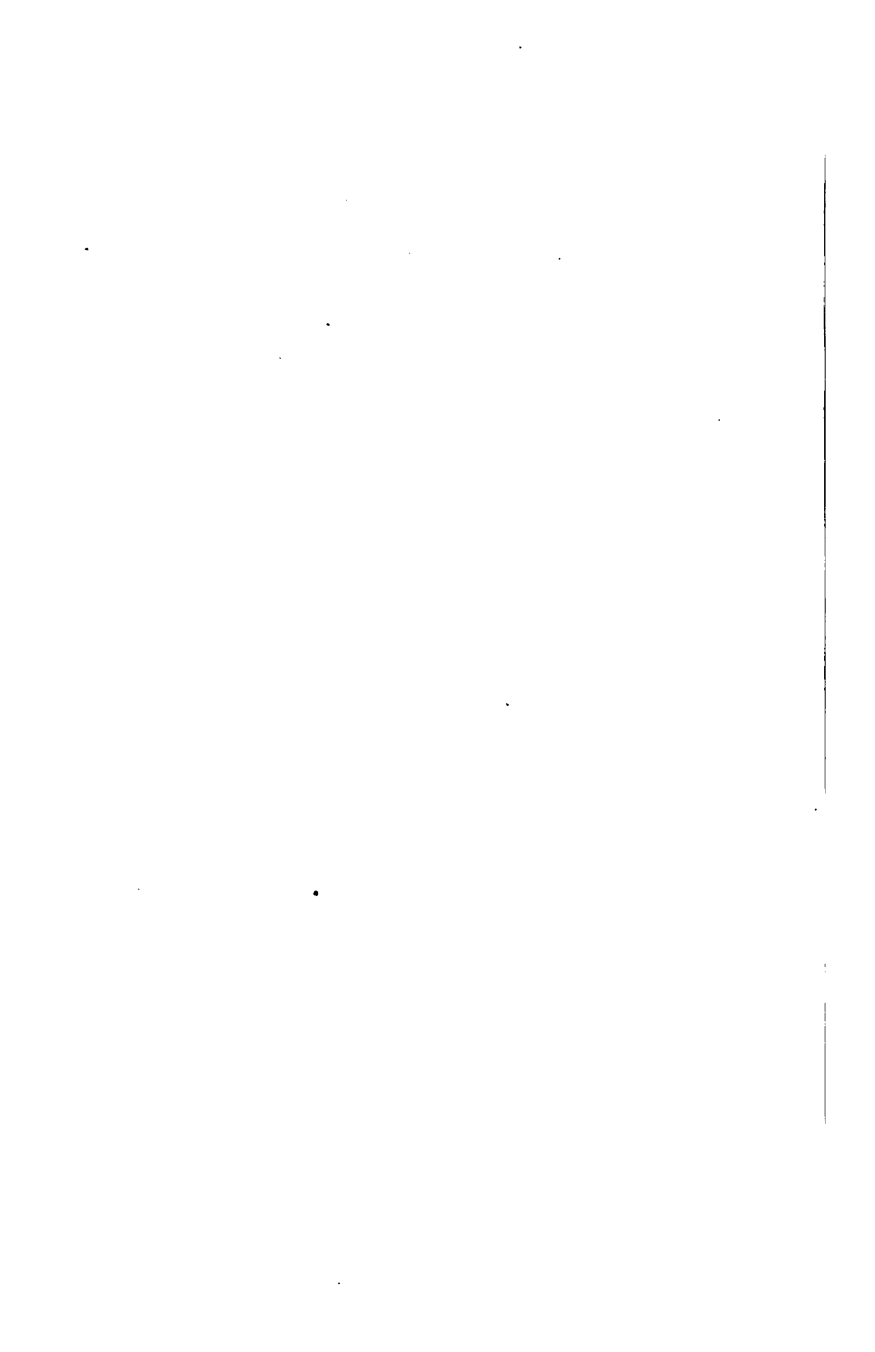
Much might be done also by ministers in their intercourse with their people; calling their attention to the subject, impressing their hearts with a sense of the sin and practical mischiefs of division, and of the duty and importance of union, and especially endeavouring to eradicate those long cherished party prejudices which form the great obstacle to the incorporation of the churches. Let us not, as some do, speak of the union of the bodies referred to as impossible, or even as improbable. Many spoke thus of the coming out of the non-intrusion ministers; and yet the Disruption has been for years a historical fact. Can the union of the four free Presbyterian churches in Scotland, two years hence, be viewed at this present moment as an event more improbable than the secession of nearly five hundred ministers from the Established Church in 1843 was felt to be in 1841?

Let us be all much engaged in sincere, earnest, and fervent prayer, that the Spirit of light and truth would remove from our minds all party and personal prejudices, that he would impart sound scriptural principles in regard to this most important subject, and that he would expand and fill the soul with Christian can-



dour, disinterestedness, brotherly love, charity, and all those holy and heavenly dispositions, the cultivation of which is recommended, enjoined, and urged upon Christians, with such amazing frequency and fervour, power, and pathos, both by our Lord and his apostles.

COLMONELL, *Nov.* 28, 1851.



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IN the opinion of some, the Evangelical Alliance has proved a failure, or, at least, has hitherto done nothing effective. Without attempting at present the difficult and delicate task, either of establishing or disproving this opinion, we may be permitted to state, that the very fact that such an alliance has been projected and formed, suggests many important and interesting lessons. And we would beg leave to advert, very briefly, to one or two of these before entering on the main subject of this essay.

The formation of the Evangelical Alliance may, we think, be justly regarded as an effort made by the truth, held in common by the several parties, to break through those walls in which they have severally enclosed themselves, and to bring them out to a common esplanade, and thus to lead them all to a recognition of their common faith, and engage them in co-operation, in opposing their common foes, and in gaining those objects in which they are all equally interested.

There are numerous and powerful principles of union in the breasts of all true Christians, by whatever denomination they may be called. And were not these principles unnaturally and violently checked, they would in-

fallibly lead to a far more extensive and hearty intercourse than is at present realized. But as a hair entangling the mainspring of a watch, will either stop altogether, or greatly impede and derange the operations of the whole machinery ; so, some maxim, or distinction, or principle, though resting, perhaps, on no real foundation, will greatly check or disturb the operation, and prevent the blessed effects of truths of the very highest importance.

But granting, for a moment, the Evangelical Alliance to be a failure, what is the lesson which we are to learn from its failure ? It is undoubtedly, "Try again." Let us examine into the causes of the supposed failure, and endeavour to get them removed. Let us investigate the errors that may have been committed, and labour to have them rectified. Has the Alliance, for instance, been attempted at first on too extensive a scale ? Let us make the attempt on one of more limited dimensions. Let the parties in Scotland labour to heal their divisions ; and those of England theirs ; and those of America theirs ; and having in this manner formed a number of segments of considerable magnitude, it might, perhaps, be a less difficult matter to complete the circle.

In Scotland, as in other countries, the church has been sadly divided and broken. But there is one peculiarity, we think, connected with the Scottish sections of the church, namely, that there is far more ground in common among them, than is generally found among the several denominations in other countries. The most of the ecclesiastical bodies in this land have the same form of church government, and besides, there is a very broad basis of common doctrine and similar practice. As the large planet, which, in the opinion of certain astrono-

mers, originally revolved, one compact body, between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, had been, by some internal commotions, rent asunder and broken into a number of fragments, so the church in Scotland, originally one, has now been divided and subdivided into many portions. But as the asteroids into which the planet has been split, one and all of them revolve round one central sun; so the several ecclesiastical bodies, though separated from one another, and moving in paths, some more and some less eccentric, still revolve round the one Sun of Righteousness, and derive all their light and warmth from his radiance and his energy.

This is, unquestionably, a very pleasing and encouraging fact, and should make us not despair of the union. The Almighty could, undoubtedly, suspend the centrifugal force of Juno, Vesta, Pallas, Ceres, and the still smaller fragments, and cause them to gravitate towards one another, and to conglomerate into one compact mass, and, by a process similar to that described in the first chapter of Genesis, reduce the whole to order and beauty. Whether he will ever perform such a work, it is impossible for us to predict. We have, however, the most abundant ground to believe that he will display his power and grace in uniting the divided portions of his church. The promises on this subject are numerous, and clear, and emphatic.

The evangelical prophet, in the midst of predictions relating chiefly to the New Testament dispensation, thus addresses and encourages the church:—"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." In another passage, the same prophet foretells the union of the dismembered and dis-

affected portions of the Redeemer's kingdom :—" He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the enmity of Judah shall be cut off : Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." This prediction, though clothed in language and allusions borrowed from Old Testament characters and events, has, as is evident from the context, a special reference to the times of the gospel. Again, God has promised that he " will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." And again, " The Lord shall be king over all the earth, and in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one." The Lord shall extend his kingdom of grace over the whole habitable globe ; and the profession of his truth, as well as the revelation of his character, shall be one in all the provinces of " his large and great dominion."

These are the promises of God. And what is our duty in regard to them ? We have no duty to perform, and no influence that we can make to bear on the reunion of fractured planets ; but we have a solemn duty to discharge, and much and varied influence which we can bring to bear on the reunion of divided churches. We have been hitherto acting in a mode fitted to strengthen the power of mutual repulsion, and weaken or neutralize the principles of mutual attraction. And no serious man, I think, can open his eyes to the fact, without being astonished to find, that the broad basis of precious gospel truth, not to speak of other principles of cohesion, held in common by the several churches in Scotland, should have produced so little of common



sympathy and common attachment, and that the points on which they differ should have excited such a chilling and alienating influence, and nourished, as they undoubtedly have done in all the sects, such an amount of party feeling. But as the quantity of hot fluid, however large, that may be poured into a vessel, never gives out its caloric, nor raises the temperature of the whole, until the portions of ice and snow that may happen to be in the same vessel are dissolved, so our unhappy divisions and schisms have sadly checked that flow of Christian love, and cramped that Christian communion, which the truth we hold in common is so admirably fitted, as well as designed, to promote. All the soul-sanctifying and soul-uniting truth on which we are agreed, seems most unhappily and strangely to retain much of its blessed influence in a latent state, as long as there are points of difference which we have not yet adjusted, and which are not yet melted away.

Let us now adopt an opposite course. Let us now sincerely and constantly labour to diminish and to annihilate the principles and feelings of mutual repulsion, and at the same time, by all means and appliances, endeavour to strengthen those of mutual attraction and cohesion. We have been rent asunder, not so much by the intrinsic importance of the principles in which we differ (though some of these may not be altogether unimportant), as by the violence of the feelings with which our disputes and controversies have been conducted. Instead of checking any root of bitterness when appearing to spring up, and threatening to trouble us, we have nourished and fostered the noxious stem; instead of making straight paths for our feet, we have rendered the way more crooked and rough, and have multiplied

and enlarged the stumblingblocks, so that what is lame, instead of being healed, has been more wrenched and distorted.

Certain principles, distinctions, and maxims, have been employed as wedges to rive us asunder, and are still allowed to remain and keep open the fissures. And this has been done, it is to be feared, without duly considering whether we had any scriptural warrant to insert these wedges, or whether it is lawful to permit them to maintain the place they have so long continued to occupy. Let us now submit some of the chief of these principles, in which our divisions have been effected, and by which they are still perpetuated, to a cool and careful examination, that we may ascertain their truth or their falsehood, their soundness or unsoundness.

There are not a few professors of religion who are in the constant habit of asserting, with all confidence and gravity, that whatever they have discovered to be divine truth, and especially if it be a truth that has been more or less opposed, they are bound by the authority of God to place it in their testimony, and not only so, but to make adherence to this truth a term of communion, and consequently to admit none to the fellowship of the church with them who do not understand this truth in the same way as they understand it, and who are not prepared to maintain it in the same mode in which they are maintaining it. Hence it is a first principle with these persons—a sort of ecclesiastical axiom—that the church's testimony must be a testimony for the whole of divine truth.

Now, this maxim needs to be carefully examined. For in one application of it, it may be perfectly just; but in another, it is exceedingly incorrect. The church bears

testimony to the whole of divine truth when she receives, recognises, and holds forth the Word of God, the whole Word of God, and nothing but the Word of God, as the perfect and infallible rule of her faith and practice. And such a testimony would be quite sufficient, were it not notorious, that there are many who, while they subscribe to such a declaration, hold sentiments and follow practices, that are subversive of the primary principles and precepts of the inspired volume. In consequence of this, it is necessary that the church, in order that her testimony may be effective, and accomplish the end for which God has commanded her to display it, should condescend on the great doctrines of the Bible, and tell the world that she understands the oracles of God as teaching the divinity and atonement of the Saviour of sinners; the justification of the guilty on the ground of the righteousness of the Surety; the sovereign influences of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying the soul; and other fundamental truths, the knowledge and belief of which the Word of God itself declares to be necessary to genuine Christianity. But the enumeration of divine truths in any testimony can never be complete.

In Turretin's system of Didactico-elenctical Theology, there are hundreds of questions, some theological, some ecclesiastical, and some historical. Now, a number of ministers may adopt all his conclusions on these questions as Bible doctrine, and thus they may give it out that they, as a section of the church, have attained to all this amount of divine truth. But are any prepared to say that they would make Turretin's system a term of communion, and require that the most humble disciple of Christ must declare his accession to all his affirmations and negations before he can be ad-

mitted to the Lord's table? It is certainly altogether unwarrantable, nay, presumptuous, for any party to make all their attainments the term of ecclesiastical fellowship with them. There is a sentiment in Isaac Taylor's work on Fanaticism, which embodies, we think, much truth and practical wisdom; and which deserves to be exhibited, as a maxim admirably fitted to counterpoise the one on which we have been animadverting. "Although," he says, "the perfection of knowledge in matters of religion is an object of the most worthy ambition of every Christian for himself, something immensely less than the perfection of religious knowledge is all that we are entitled to demand from others, as the condition of holding with them Christian fellowship."

No man can conscientiously unite with any church, or continue in her fellowship, if, in order to this, he is required to subscribe to articles which he does not believe, or to concur in practices by which, with his convictions of duty, he would be involved in sin. But a man may most warrantably unite with a church, though that church does not make every article which he believes to be Bible truth a term of communion, or even embody that article in her testimony, provided always, that he is at perfect liberty to employ every scriptural mode of exhibiting and propagating his peculiar views of truth and of duty, for which he must ever feel the highest and most sacred responsibility.

If we inquire into the origin, and examine the history of the ecclesiastical divisions which have taken place in Scotland, we will find, we think, that on the principle just now stated, the separating parties were all in duty bound to act as they did, in consequence of the terms demanded in order to their remaining in connection with

the churches to which they originally belonged ; or, in other words, *the separating parties*, in each successive secession, *were thrown out* ; that is, with their convictions of duty they had no alternative but either to separate or to sin.

Let us begin with the *Old Dissenters*, or society people, who refused to accede to the Church of Scotland, as re-established at the Revolution. "These," in the language of Dr Charters, their eloquent panegyrist, "appeared in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution, assuming the high character of witnesses for God, and maintaining it in the face of danger and death. Though few in number, like the gleanings of grapes after the vintage, and a few berries on the top of the outermost bough, they lifted the fallen standard of religious liberty, and generously devoted themselves to maintain it. They would swear no oaths, subscribe no bonds, take no test, nor yield to any imposition on the conscience."

Among the other epithets by which, as a remnant, the Covenanters characterised and distinguished themselves, *Anti-Erastian* was emblazoned on their standard with marked distinctness. The church at the Revolution was, in their estimation, settled on principles decidedly Erastian. And hence these people could not, with their convictions of duty, unite themselves with a church which had, without remonstrance, accepted of an establishment, based on an act which, after having been superseded by a national recognition of the church's independence, was, at the Revolution, resuscitated—an act which invested the sovereign with authority to appoint the meetings of her Assemblies. They could not unite with a church which permitted her supreme court to be repeatedly prorogued and dissolved by the

civil power, and allowed the state to dictate the terms on which she was to receive certain applicants into the ministry.

Accordingly, when Shields, Linning, and Boyd, who, after the death of Renwick, the last of the martyrs, had presided in the societies of the Covenanters, entered the Revolution church, the people took up the Anti-Erastian standard which these ministers had dropped at the portal, and bore it aloft until they obtained a gospel ministry and a Presbyterian constitution, in a state of dissent from the Established Church.

The Seceders, again—the Erskines and their brethren—were *thrown out of the Established Church*, to which they originally belonged, inasmuch as they were denied ministerial freedom, in maintaining what they felt to be great scriptural principles, and in protesting against the Erastian encroachments of the state, and the tyrannical domination of the prevailing party in the church; and after they had formed their Secession, the Seceders proceeded to act on principles which practically said that they should have never belonged to the church as then established. In consequence of the rapid and great increase of the Secession, and its extensive spread throughout large portions of Scotland, it contributed greatly to the maintenance and diffusion of precious gospel truth during the long reign of Moderatism in the Establishment, and contributed also to the discussion of the important questions respecting the freedom and spiritual independence of the church.

Gillespie, the founder of the Relief, was deposed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for absenting himself from the induction of a presentee, who was intruded into the parish of Inverkeithing, contrary

to the will of the congregation, and the Relief body was of course *thrown out*, because they could not succumb to patronage.

The two Old Light parties—the Original Burghers and Original Antiburghers—were also *thrown out*, inasmuch as the synods to which they respectively belonged framed a new exhibition of principles, and hastily enacted these as the terms of ministerial and Christian communion. These new terms the Old Light ministers regarded as in some very important points directly opposed to the principles to which they had appended their subscriptions, and which they had in their ordination vows solemnly pledged themselves to maintain ; and therefore, with their views of truth and convictions of duty, they were constrained to separate.

The Free Church was *thrown out*, because the ministers of the Disruption could not abandon what they believed to be great scriptural principles, and could not concur in acts by which they felt they would be personally involved in sin.

But what is the duty which all these parties, thus by the violence of controversy scattered and separated, owe to one another? They ought not, surely, each piquing itself on the position into which it has been cast, or which it may have selected, to cherish and manifest that party spirit and alienation which all, without exception, have too long and too much displayed, and which, alas! we must say, they continue, less or more, to display to this present time.

In looking on one another hitherto, the eye seems chiefly to have rested on those peculiarities of form, or of feature, or of costume, by which each was distinguished from all the rest. Let us now begin to acquire

and cultivate a different habit. Let us learn to fix our view on those grand features of Christian character which belong in common to all, and which establish identity of species, and prove us the children of the same Father.

Ought not the several parties, under the blessed influence of their common Christianity, forthwith, to commence negotiations to ascertain how much truth they *do* hold in common,—how many of their differences are misconceptions,—how few of them are real,—how many of those that are real may be removed or diminished,—and then solemnly to weigh the question, whether, on the ground of the differences that, after all these processes, may still remain, they have the authority of God to continue in a state of disunion and separation?

We shall advert to another of those maxims which have operated in making and keeping up our divisions.

It is affirmed by some that whatever the church (and by the church in this connection these persons mean very frequently their own particular party) has attained, and has asserted in her testimony, must, provided it be Bible truth, by no means be dropped, or cease to be made a term of communion, and in support of this assertion they are in the habit of referring to Phil. iii. 15, 16—"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded, and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing." Now, we humbly conceive that, on a close examination of this passage, it will lead us to a very different conclusion. There were two classes in the Philippian church—the more advanced class, or, as the apostle designates them,



the perfect, and the less advanced, or lower class. The first had more enlarged views of truth and duty; and for these the apostle reminds them they were individually responsible, and they were bound to act upon them, and at the same time to endeavour, in the use of all proper means, to bring up others to their attainments. But the apostle by no means enjoins the advanced class to erect themselves into a separate church, or *sect*, and to make their superior attainments terms of communion, and not to admit the other class to their fellowship until they were prepared to subscribe to all their advanced views of truth and duty. Nay, on the contrary, he authoritatively enjoins them, that, in as far as they were agreed, they should walk together in unity, trusting that God would carry forward all classes in knowledge, and in every Christian attainment, and also in time effect greater unanimity of sentiment.

There is a passage in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, on which we would beg leave here to make a single comment. In that passage, the apostle exhorts us, notwithstanding diversity of sentiment in some respects, and manifold defects which we may discern in one another, to maintain peace and harmony in our corporate state, while every effort ought to be made to attain to greater unanimity of sentiment, and higher moral perfection—"I exhort you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, till we all come *unto* the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

In this chapter the apostle states, that the gospel dispensation has been introduced, and the gospel ministry

appointed, to bring the church into that state of perfection, to which she could not be conducted by the preceding dispensations. He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all "come *unto* the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

When the apostle here speaks of the perfecting of the *saints*, he does not refer to the perfecting of *saints*, or the preparing of individual believers for heaven ; for that work has been accomplished under every dispensation of grace. He means the perfecting of *the saints* as a *society*, or, in other words, the perfecting of the *church*. His statement implies, that the church is, and may be for a long time, imperfect. She is imperfect in a variety of respects, on many of which we cannot here stop to condescend. One of these imperfections, however, and one to which we would now briefly advert, is the want of complete harmony of sentiment among all her members on the higher matters of Christianity. Among the members of the church there are little children, and there are young men, and there are fathers ; there are some who are of full age, and can use strong meat ; there are others who are babes, unskilful in the word of righteousness, and must use milk. Many, who on scriptural grounds are entitled to membership in the church of Christ, may be in ignorance or in error about many of the theological, ecclesiastical, and historical questions which belong to the higher departments of Christianity. There is a time coming, we believe, when the members of the church generally shall be far more intelligent on all biblical

subjects than the bulk of them hitherto have been ; and when many of the questions, the agitation of which has split and rent the church, being examined in a truly Christian spirit, shall be better understood, and the truth involved in these questions, being separated from errors both on the one hand and on the other, shall be universally adopted. And the apostle, in the chapter under consideration, tells us how this blessed result is to be accomplished. We must, he says, maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, *until* we all come into the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God.

Many seem to suppose that union and incorporation is the end, and harmony of sentiment on all important points connected with Christianity is the means in order to that end. And hence the principle so generally acted on, that the several sections of the church must not incorporate into one body until they are all united in the same sentiments. Now, the arrangement of the apostle is the very opposite of this. He proposes full harmony of sentiment as the great end to be gained, and he enjoins the maintenance of corporate unity—and consequently the restoration of this where it may have been violated—as the means of accomplishing that all-important object. Endeavour, he says, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, till we all come into the unity of the faith. Wherever diversity of sentiment exists, there will be a tendency to split and break off into parties. But we must make every effort to resist this tendency, and to keep the unity of the Spirit, and preserve unbroken the bond of peace. The apostle is addressing Christians, the members of the church ; and consequently, in this exhortation, it is taken for granted

that they are united on those matters, the knowledge, faith, profession, and practice of which are necessary to qualify persons for membership in this sacred society. But though united on these matters, there may be much ignorance or error, and great diversity of opinion among the members on other subjects of very great importance. The apostle, however, commands and intreats them not to break into parties on account of these diversities. All are to seek after higher views of truth and of duty; and those who have attained more enlarged and more accurate discoveries of divine things, are to make every endeavour to bring up their less advanced brethren, and to teach them the will of the Lord more perfectly; or, in other words, without dividing into parties, all discussions and controversies on matters over and above the grounds on which persons are to be admitted into the church of Christ, must be carried on in the united church.

“The will of Christ,” says Isaac Taylor, “is, that his followers, notwithstanding many diversities of opinion, should remain in love and communion. The prohibition of church divisions is as explicit and intelligible as the prohibition of murder.”

This law of the Redeemer has, however, been sadly violated in Scotland, as well as in other Protestant countries. The positions which the dissenting bodies in this land respectfully occupy, have been determined chiefly by the angle of projection and the degree of force with which they were severally thrown off when their separations took place, and partly also by the repulsive influence which they may have received from one another. Is it not just and right, nay, is it not an indispensable duty which all parties owe to the Head of the Church,

and to one another, calmly and seriously to examine their respective positions and their relations and actings one towards another? and to inquire whether all is sound and warrantable? or, whether there is not much that calls for a great and decided change?

We have adverted to certain maxims and distinctions which have operated as wedges in rending and splitting the church. We would now bring forward a principle which, if sound, and if received and acted on, would effectually draw together all the divisions and subdivisions, and bind them, notwithstanding much remaining diversity of sentiment, in a concordant peace.

The principle is this: That the terms of communion in every part of the church must be identically the same as the qualifications which entitle persons to membership in the church of Christ, and to a seat at his table.

A society calling itself a church, which by its constitution and laws admits to membership those whose principles and conduct disqualify them in the eye of God's Word for that high privilege, has no title to be recognised as a church of Christ. And, on the other hand, a church which, by its terms of communion, refuses admission to those who have a right to membership in Christ's church, and to a seat at his table, is undoubtedly acting an unwarrantable and tyrannical part. When the ministers of Christ are preaching the gospel, they have, without all question, the commission and authority of their Master to admit all to hear them who have a right to that ordinance, viz., all sinners. And when the same ministers are dispensing the Lord's Supper, have they not also the same divine commission and authority to admit, when they apply, all who, on scriptural grounds, have a right to that sacred institution?

There are just two classes of persons in the world :— Those who, in the eye of God's Word, have a title to membership in the church of the Redeemer, and those who have not. The church which admits the latter does egregiously wrong ; and the church which excludes the former, does egregiously wrong also. The ground of admission is a right to membership in the church of Christ, and the ground of exclusion is the want of that right.

They who stand at the gates of Zion, professing by the authority of Christ to receive or refuse applicants for admission, would need to see well to it that they act in strict accordance with his divine instructions. They ought to be very careful, on the one hand, not to admit those who have no right,—and on the other, not to exclude those who have a right to enter the holy city. And the terms of admission are, or ought to be, the same at all the gates of the city. There is not one gate by which the rich are to enter, and another by which the poor are to enter ; neither is there one gate for those who are fathers, and another for those who are young men, and another for those who are little children ; one door of entrance for such as have very extensive and correct views of all theological, ecclesiastical, and historical questions, and another for such as may be in great ignorance and even error on many of these matters, and who may know merely the first principles of the doctrine of Christ ;—all who are admissible into the city of our God may enter at any one of the gates. The porters who are stationed at one gate, have no warrant to say to any who may apply to them, we do not pronounce you unworthy of membership in the visible church of Christ, we do not declare you unworthy of a seat at his table,

but we cannot allow you to enter by our gate. Such procedure is utterly unwarrantable. The duty and province of every porter is to ascertain who have a title to ascend the hill of the Lord, and to dwell in his holy place, and who have not, and to admit the former and exclude the latter.

The Church of England has no warrant from God's Word, we think, to hang up her ecclesiastical canons, or even all her articles of religion, at the portal of Zion which she occupies, and to pronounce the sentence of excommunication on all who may be so bold as to impugn any one of these, and to refuse admission into the church of Christ to such impugners until they have revoked what she is pleased to style their wicked errors.

The Church of England is peculiarly arrogant on this matter. She not only refuses to admit by her gate those who impugn any of her dogmas, but she would keep every other gate shut against them. Hence the twelfth canon, entitled, "*Maintainers of constitutions made in conventicles censured*:"—"Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that it is lawful for any sect of ministers and lay-persons, or of either of them, to join together, and make rules, orders, or constitutions, in causes ecclesiastical, without the King's authority, and shall submit themselves to be ruled and governed by them: let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not be restored, until they repent and publicly revoke those their wicked errors."

Neither has the Established Church of Scotland, in our opinion, a right to suspend her Confession of Faith, in all its amplitude of articles, and her Books of Discipline, together with the Acts of Parliament and the Acts of Assembly, claiming and admitting the domina-

tion of the state over the church, and enacting and recognising the right of the Crown, and other patrons, to interfere in the establishment of the pastoral relation. The Established Church of Scotland, we say, has no right to suspend these documents at her portal, and to exclude from church communion, or from the office of the Christian ministry, all who cannot conscientiously subscribe them.

And have the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Original Secession, we would ask, a warrant to exhibit at the gates where they have their station, their respective testimonies, containing long catalogues of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and historical questions, many of which are very recondite and of difficult solution, and exclude from Christ's church all who cannot answer these questions in the way in which they require them to be answered?

And has any body of Christ's ministers and people a right to demand, in order to ecclesiastical fellowship with them, any thing over and above what God in his Word requires, in order to admission into his church, and to a seat at his table? "It would be strange," says Bishop Stillingfleet, "that the church should require more than Christ himself did; and make other conditions of her communion than our Saviour did of discipleship."

Some of the religious bodies to whom we have adverted, deny that in refusing fellowship with them to such as cannot subscribe to every article in their testimonies, they pronounce any judgment on the title of such persons to membership in the Redeemer's church, and to a seat at his table. They say, we merely do not admit them to fellowship *with us*. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, however, they do pronounce judgment



on this title, and the most important of all judgments, viz., a practical judgment, inasmuch as they, so far as their authority can extend, exclude from the church of Christ all who do not embrace their testimony.

For instance, were the Reformed Presbyterian Church the only church on earth, all who could not embrace the testimony and the terms of communion of that church, in all their multifarious articles, would, however orthodox and pious and holy, be obliged to remain without baptism for their children, and without the communion ordinance, all the days of their life. And every church whose terms of communion exceed the scriptural qualifications for membership in the church of Christ, would, provided it were the only church on earth, exclude all who, though in the eye of God's Word entitled to church-fellowship, could not coincide in these extra articles.

In the New Testament, there are many exhortations to cast out, and to separate, and to withdraw. But from whom are Christians to separate or withdraw? And whom are they warranted to reject? Certainly those persons only, who, by their sentiments or their practice, are unworthy of membership in the church of Christ. There is not a single hint in the New Testament that any body of Christ's ministers and people may warrantably refuse fellowship with them to those who, on scriptural grounds, are entitled to church-membership and to a seat at the Lord's table in any part of the visible church.

When the religious bodies to whom we have been adverting refuse to admit to their ecclesiastical fellowship a man on account of his moral or religious *conduct*, they do so only when his conduct is such as would dis-

qualify him for membership in the church of Christ at all, or to a seat at the Lord's table any where. When they reject a man who is a drunkard, or a Sabbath-breaker, or a profane swearer, or a licentious person,—they are not understood to say, “In rejecting you we pronounce no judgment on your title to membership in the church of Christ, or to a seat at the communion table; we merely declare you cannot be admitted to membership *with us*.” The ground, surely, why they refuse to receive into their fellowship such characters is, that such characters have no right, on the principles of God's Word, to church-fellowship any where. Why then should these portions of the church refuse fellowship with them to a man on account of his *ignorance or errors*, or *speculative opinions*,—unless his ignorance, errors, and speculative opinions are such as to disqualify him for church-membership at all? Why act on one principle in reference to *conduct*, and on another principle in reference to *sentiment*? If a man ought not, on account of his ignorance of certain truths, or his errors in relation to these truths, to be debarred from Christ's church,—then surely he ought not on account of such ignorance or error to be debarred from any part of Christ's church. A part is not greater than the whole; and if any man is really admissible to the church of God, he must be admissible to any part of it, for Christ is not divided; and we cannot conceive that the Lord of the church has given authority to any section of his church to refuse admission to fellowship in it to any man on any other ground than that he is not admissible to church-fellowship at all.

This seems to be a first principle—a truth which must occupy a position at the basis of all ecclesiastical poli-

tics. And hence this principle cannot be modified by testimony-bearing, but, on the contrary, all testimony-bearing must be modified by it: or, in other words, whatever testimony the church, or any part of the church, may at any time be in duty bound to put forth, it must not be so constructed, or so applied, as to exclude from fellowship those who apply, and who at the same time are, on scriptural grounds, entitled to church-membership any where.

It ought undoubtedly to be the aim of the church, as it ought to be that of every individual Christian, to ascertain the whole of revealed truth, and it must at the same time be the church's duty to display a testimony for all the truth which she has ascertained. But, "something immensely less than the perfection of religious knowledge, or even of ascertained truth, is all she is entitled to demand from those whom she admits into her fellowship."

The terms of communion were settled by Christ himself when he erected the church and instituted the gospel ministry; and these were, visible discipleship, the knowledge, profession, and doing of those things which constitute a man a visible Christian. "Go," said the Saviour to his apostles, "disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Much teaching may be requisite to make Christians eminently intelligent, well informed, or, as these are sometimes called in the New Testament, perfect. This going on unto perfection, however, was to be promoted in the church; but men were to be baptized and thus admitted, simply on the ground of their discipleship, and these terms ought

undoubtedly to remain unalterable unto the end of the world, and to be acted upon at all times and by every part and section of the church.

The apostolic and primitive church, without all question, received into her fellowship all who applied, and who at the same time possessed the qualifications of visible discipleship. The Church of Rome most presumptuously multiplied the terms of communion, made most sinful and unwarrantable terms of admission, and not only excluded from her communion, but in consequence of the dominant power she had acquired over the state, excluded from the pale of civil society, and persecuted to death, all who could not believe as she believed, who could not accede to her exorbitant requisitions.

There was, therefore, an absolute necessity for a secession from such a church. The legitimate grounds of separation and secession from any church are, sinful and unwarrantable terms of communion.

When the Reformed Church revived primitive Christianity, she ought to have returned to the primitive mode of admitting applicants, and to have received all simply on the ground of visible discipleship. If any person entitled to membership in Christ's church, applied to the Protestant Church in preference to the Church of Rome, such a preference was, on his part, a sufficient testimony in behalf of Protestantism to entitle him to admission.

In like manner, those who stood aloof from the Established Church of Scotland at the Revolution, did in our opinion perfectly right; inasmuch as the Established Church at that period surrendered her spiritual independence, and recognised and enacted sinful terms of ministerial, if not of Christian communion and fellowship.

While thus constrained by the sinful terms in the

National Church to form themselves into a separate ecclesiastical body, they ought to have proceeded to admit members who applied to them in preference to the Establishment, on the original apostolic ground, namely, visible discipleship. And so ought the Seceders to have done. And so ought all parties to do, when excluded from the church with which they were connected, by unwarrantable and sinful impositions on the conscience. A serious error, we believe, prevails in certain sections of the church respecting the nature of the church's testimony, and especially as to the mode of maintaining and applying it. The principle acted on in these bodies is, that whatever they have ascertained to be Bible truth, they are bound by the authority of Christ to embody into their testimony, and to require a subscription or an adherence to every article in this testimony from all those that apply to them for church-membership. According to this principle, the terms of admission into the Christian church must be ever varying and increasing as the church advances in the ascertainment of divine truth. In which case, the church would be like some provident society, the terms of admission to which increase, from time to time, with the augmentation of the funds of the society, and the extension of the benefits derived from it; so that whereas, at its first formation, and while it was poor, the entry-money was, let us say, half-a-crown, then it rose to half-a-guinea, then to a guinea, then to five guineas, and so on in infinite progression. Nay, the church has split into different branch associations on this very point, some requiring one term of admission, and others another.

This is certainly a very incorrect idea of the church. The terms of admission were fixed by her Divine Founder

at the time of her erection, and these were, visible discipleship. "Go," said our blessed Lord in his commission to his apostles, "disciple all nations;" and as men become my disciples, "baptize them"—admit them to membership in my church; and these terms are, without all question, to remain the same, unchanged and unchangeable, throughout all periods of the church's history, and throughout all the successive stages of her advancement in knowledge and purity. If we can possibly contemplate any change in the terms of admission, this can only be on the supposition that a change has taken place in the qualifications necessary to constitute visible discipleship.

Visible discipleship and a right to membership must ever be identical. How rich soever the church may have become in intellectual and in moral wealth, and how great and numerous soever may be the benefits enjoyed in her communion, all who possess the characteristics of visible discipleship, though they possess nothing more, are entitled to share fully in all these benefits. How much soever the capital of the society may have increased, yet every person who brings with him the original term of admission is entitled to all the advantages of this wealthy incorporation.

*This is not after the manner of man.* It is, however, the principle of divine liberality—it is worthy of God, who dispenses his blessings according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ.

Some churches, we believe, act on the simple principle of admission which we are recommending. The United Presbyterian Church, we suppose, does so. When a person applies for admission to that church, the minister and session to whom the application is made, receives

the applicant simply on his visible discipleship, on his "professing his faith in Christ and obedience to him," on his knowledge and belief of the great doctrines of the gospel, and his scriptural piety and morality. They do not require him to repudiate or abjure the establishment principle, or formally to approve of voluntarism. They may employ all suitable means to enlighten the public and their own members in what they deem to be the truth on these and other matters of church politics. But they do not make any view of these principles a ground of admission to, or exclusion from, the privileges of the church.

The Free Church, we imagine, proceeds on the same plan. Of course, those who apply to the Free Church, in preference to the Establishment, are supposed by their application to approve of the noble stand which she has made, in vindicating and maintaining her spiritual independence. But the admission of applicants is not suspended on their giving in their accession to all the questions involved in that controversy, as exhibited in her catechism, or even in her authoritative documents. These may be employed by her ministers and office-bearers in imparting to her people accurate and enlarged views of her history, and of her principles. But an adherence to them is not a condition of membership.

Other sections of the church, and, in particular, the Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Seceders, have been all along regulating their practice on principles the very opposite to that which we are endeavouring to establish. They have collected and arranged, in their respective testimonies, a large congeries of principles relating to doctrines, to ecclesiastical politics, to the history and procedure of churches and nations in former

times, &c. &c., and they have enacted these testimonies as terms of Christian, as well as ministerial, communion and they refuse admission to church-membership with them to all applicants who, however worthy in other respects, cannot accede to the numerous and various articles in their testimonies.

Now, it is this part of the ecclesiastical procedure of these bodies which we would, with all respect, but with all earnestness, ask them to reconsider and examine. Religious bodies, like the individuals composing them, are liable to err; and many of them have fallen into serious errors, both speculative and practical. It is a hard matter, however, to bring bodies of men to engage in the work of self-examination; and it is, besides, a very difficult thing to be honest in accomplishing such a work, even when it may be attempted. We may have embraced principles, supposing them to be God's truth, and truths eminently connected with his glory; and we may have embraced these principles from a sincere regard to divine authority, and from love to God, and to his truth. It does not, however, follow necessarily from all this that these principles are correct; but these circumstances render it very difficult for us, should they be incorrect, to see and admit them to be so.

No where do the *Idola* spoken of by Lord Bacon—those blinding influences which prevent the mind from perceiving fully and distinctly the truth—act more powerfully and pertinaciously than in the matters of a public religious profession. The conscience in this case is in danger of being entangled, and we may be deterred from an honest and candid investigation, lest we should feel ourselves bound in conscience to abandon and repudiate principles which we at one time had most con-



scientiously adopted. Besides, in these matters our consistency is at stake ; and not merely our own consistency, but, what is sometimes felt to be even more dear, the consistency of our fathers—of fathers, it may be in some cases, according to the flesh, and of fathers, in all cases, *quoad sacra*—is in hazard of being called in question. There is on the part of many a powerful reluctance to look on the fallacies and errors of venerated, and justly venerated ancestors ; and some positively refuse to open their eyes on such a spectacle.

Our mission, however, is to discover truth, and we ought to lay aside all prejudices, and especially those which most easily beset us, and proceed in our work unremittingly and ardently. We must honestly and sincerely endeavour to detect and expose our own errors and those of others—the errors of communities, as well as of individuals. Civil constitutions and laws, though framed in former times by the wisest and greatest of men, have been found to require modification, and have been modified accordingly, and are being modified every day. But some churches seem to think that their constitutions and laws, because framed by their forefathers, must be, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, immutable. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, when establishing its constitution, appointed a “council of censors,” on whom it imposed, among other duties, that of “proposing every two years what might appear to them necessary for amending any articles of the constitution which might be defective, explaining such as might be thought not clearly expressed, and adding such as might be necessary for securing the rights and promoting the happiness of the people.” This arrangement implied that these statesmen were aware that they were

fallible and erring men; and it implied, at the same time, their desire that any errors in legislation which they might have committed, should be detected and rectified. It would be well if churches also would act upon this principle. Our fathers who framed our testimonies, whatever might be their talents and excellencies, were no more infallible than the convention of Pennsylvania; and therefore all their enactments should be regarded as subject to revision and correction. In all ages, men of the most gigantic minds, who have contributed most eminently in their day to the advancement of truth in any of its departments, have been found to have admitted fallacies into their reasonings and principles. Even on those subjects to which they had devoted the largest and greatest attention, some of their humble disciples, "who were not worthy to mend their pens," were, nevertheless, just because they were the disciples of those great men, and because they outlived them, able to detect the fallacies of their masters.

As ecclesiastical bodies, we ourselves have, in some of the previous stages of our being, committed errors in regard to terms of communion, which we have by our practice been constrained, at least implicitly, to acknowledge. The Reformed Presbyterians, at one period, excluded from the fellowship of the church a large portion of Christ's visible disciples, whom they now readily admit to their communion. For a long time they refused all who, however worthy in other respects, could not approve of the renovation of the covenants at Auchinsauth, in 1712. Some time ago they dropped this article from the terms of their communion; and hence they now admit those whom they formerly excluded from the sealing ordinances of the church. Now,

in their former conduct the magnitude of the evil did not lie in the Reformed Presbyterians holding as individuals, or even as a body, erroneous views as to the character of that transaction of their forefathers. It lay chiefly in making an adherence to these erroneous views a term of communion, and thus excluding from Christ's ordinances, as dispensed by them, all who could not concur with them in sentiments which they now practically acknowledge to be incorrect.

Again, in regard to the Seceders, it has for a long time been clearly proved, that many of the New Light Antiburghers understood neither New Light nor Old Light principles. Hence they constructed a confused and self-contradictory document, entitled "The Narrative and Testimony," and enacted it as a term of Christian and ministerial communion in the body. Under this testimony, the General Associate Synod frequently in their congregations renewed the National Covenant and the Solemn League; while the distinctive principle of that testimony, as afterwards fully developed in Voluntaryism, went to show that it is incompetent for nations, as such, or the state, to legislate, or covenant, in favour of any particular form or profession of religion. In one question of the formula appointed by the Synod to be taken by ministers and elders, the entrant into office was required to own the warrantableness and the continued obligation of the National Covenant and of the Solemn League. And, in another question, he was required to declare his adherence to the Narrative and Testimony, which Narrative and Testimony, when properly understood, taught that these covenants, as national deeds, ought never to have been framed or sworn.\*

\* See the late Dr M'Crie's "Statement of the Difference," &c.

The late Dr Stevenson and the late Dr Paxton, and their brethren, who, with the Constitutional Presbytery, formed the Synod of Original Seceders, explicitly, as well as by their public conduct, acknowledged that for many years they entertained very inaccurate opinions respecting the great principles of their public profession. Now, as in the case of the Reformed Presbyterians, so in the case of the Seceders, the evil did not lie in these worthy men entertaining, or even in publishing, confused and self-contradictory sentiments. It consisted chiefly in their forming these sentiments into a *rail*, and placing this around the communion table, and thus refusing to applicants admission to this solemn ordinance, unless these applicants would subscribe to such inaccurate opinions; or, in other words, give in their accession to the Narrative and Testimony.

All who duly reflect on the subject must feel and acknowledge, that it is a very serious and delicate matter for uninspired and erring men to make statements of divine truth in their language, and, at the same time, to require a subscription to these statements as a condition of membership in Christ's church. And although it is readily granted that something of this kind is absolutely necessary, in order that the members of the church may understand and have confidence in one another as to their common Christianity, such a subscription should never, in the case of communicants, be extended beyond those things which constitute a title to membership in the Christian church, and, in the case of ministers, to those views of divine truth which comprise a clear, sound, and evangelical ministry.

The acknowledged errors of our fathers should certainly make us very cautious, lest we be found per-

petuating the same or similar errors. In making the above statements, we are under no apprehension of being charged with want of due respect to the parties referred to; for the more distinguished these parties were for talents, and learning, and Christian excellence, so much the stronger is our argument. We have no wish to call forth to view the errors or weaknesses of our fathers, except for the purpose of taking home to ourselves the solemn lessons of humility and caution which we are undoubtedly bound to learn from them. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Let the truth be established, and error detected and exposed, at all expense. And when necessary, let the dead be summoned from the tomb, to confess the latter, as well as to bear testimony to the former.

In bringing out evidence in a public court, it is often useful to cross-question the witnesses, and to put the interrogations in a variety of forms. The same process ought to be employed for the discovery of philosophic and religious truth. Hence, Lord Bacon, in his "Wisdom of the Ancients," observes:—"In putting nature to the question, it is eminently wholesome to be doubting, cross-examining, complaining, and ever appealing from the decisions of philosophers, on all subjects within the jurisdiction of nature, to nature herself." In like manner, we ought ever to be appealing from the opinions of divines, and the decisions of church courts, and the practices of churches, on all subjects within the jurisdiction of Scripture and reason, to Scripture and reason themselves. We must cross-question the *witnesses for the truth*, and put the questions in every variety of shape that may be best fitted to bring out the truth most fully and clearly. Now, the question to be tried is this: *Has any part of Christ's church—any number of Christ's*

*ministers and people—the authority and warrant of their Divine Master to preclude from church-fellowship WITH THEM any applicants, except on the ground that they regard these applicants as not entitled to membership in the church at all?*

Perhaps an illustration or two may elucidate the meaning and import of this question, and bring the subject more clearly and powerfully home to our “bosoms and business.” Let us suppose, that a man in the moral waste of some of the lanes and closes of Glasgow, or a member of the Communists’ Hall, is conducted by God’s good providence to wait on the ministry of the Rev. Dr William Symington, who is one of the Reformed Presbyterian ministers of that city. The gospel becomes the power of God unto salvation to this man. He is brought to see his character and condition as a sinner. He obtains a discovery of the glory, excellence, and all-sufficiency of the Saviour, and he is led to close with him as offered in the gospel. He becomes an altered man, abandons his former vicious habits, and enters on and perseveres in the path of evangelical obedience. This convert to Christianity pays repeated visits to Dr Symington, with whom he holds much interesting conversation about the Saviour and salvation. At length, he proposes to join the fellowship of the church, and requests Dr Symington’s advice on the subject. “I trust,” he says, “that I am now joined to the Lord, and is it not my duty to join myself to the people of the Lord? Besides, my wife bore a child lately, and I think I ought to have this child baptized. Is it not my duty to do all this?” “Undoubtedly,” says Dr Symington, “I am persuaded it is your bounden duty to do so.” “You think I am qualified to be a member of the

church." "I have no hesitation in saying I believe you are." "Then," says the man, "I wish to join your congregation. I have no doubt that your ministry has been blessed to my soul, and it is my desire still to sit under it, and enjoy the ordinances of grace along with the people of your charge."

Here, Dr Symington, after a pause, proceeds to make some statements as to the terms of communion in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. "We," he observes, "have a testimony which, besides containing those doctrines which are held in common by us and all evangelical churches, embraces important principles which other bodies either disregard or deny, and for which we deem it our duty as witnesses for truth to testify. In particular, we cannot recognise the present government of Great Britain as God's moral ordinance of civil magistracy." "That may be all very well," says the applicant; "you are responsible for your views of divine truth, and you ought undoubtedly to hold and propagate them." "But," says Dr Symington, "we require an accession to our testimony, and an approval of all these principles, by all who join in church-fellowship with us, and we admit none to the Lord's table in our body but those who espouse, profess, and act upon the principles which I have stated."

"That," says the applicant, "is an entirely different matter. I have no objections to join you, knowing that you hold and teach these principles, but I am afraid I could not accede to your testimony in all its articles, and especially in those that you have particularised as the condition of my receiving the ordinances of grace among you. I attended somewhat to politics before I attended to religion; and though I have, blessed be God, been

led by your instrumentality to change entirely my religious sentiments, and, from being an infidel, to become a believer in the gospel, I have seen no reason to change my political creed,—at least, on the point to which you have referred. I am persuaded that the present government of Britain is the moral ordinance of heaven for the administration of justice, and for all the ends for which political government has been appointed by God.”

Now, what does Dr Symington do in this case? He must either abandon his testimony, as a term of communion, in some of its main articles, or reject the applicant. And we presume, of course, that he does the latter.

Let us now suppose that a person, of similar character, and in similar circumstances, is led to attend the ministry of the Rev. Dr M'Crie, who is one of the Original Secession ministers in the city of Edinburgh. The process is in all respects the same as that which we have described. When the proposal is made for membership, Dr M'Crie informs the applicant that an accession to the testimony emitted by the Original Secession Synod is the condition of membership in his congregation; and, in particular, that those who are admitted to the communion table, must own the continued obligation of the covenants. This condition cannot be complied with, and the applicant is rejected accordingly.\*

\* The two reverend gentlemen here referred to are our own particular friends, for whose persons and character we cherish the highest regard; and we have introduced them by name, for this reason, that in an illustrative case of this nature, it is far more effective to bring a particular individual actor on the stage, than an indefinite and shadowy personage, such as “a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church,” or “a minister of the Original Secession.”



Now, we think that we have a right, and that the whole religious world has a right, to ask the Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Seceders to produce their warrant for such procedure.

We shall now particularise the question which we have stated above ; and we would prescribe for all the ministers, preachers, and students of the *Reformed Presbyterian Synod* this question as a *thesis* :—

*Have the Reformed Presbyterians the authority and warrant of the Head of the Church to preclude from membership with them all the visible disciples of Christ, except that portion of them whose sentiments about the British government coincide with those which they have exhibited in their Testimony ?*

And for all the ministers, preachers, and students of the *Original Secession Synod* we would state the question in these terms :—

*Have the Original Seceders the authority and warrant of the Head of the Church to preclude from membership with them all the visible disciples of Christ, except that portion of them who hold those views of national establishments, and of the covenants, exhibited in their Testimony ?*

Turretin is our great master and pattern, in the mode of handling such questions as these. We are always in danger of acting on intermediate principles. But we can never be sure that these principles are sound, and that the conduct founded on them is correct, until we go down to the ultimate principles from which must spring all the *science* of the subject, whatever this may be, whether morals, or government, or ecclesiastical politics. We must, therefore, go down to the first principles of the subject in hand ; and we must see the steps

by which we are conducted from these first principles up to the conclusion, that the ecclesiastical bodies referred to are warranted to act as they have been doing, in regard to the admission and exclusion of applicants to the Lord's table. We must have something decidedly syllogistic on this matter. For unless this conduct can be defended by a process of reasoning rigidly logical, it must, without all question, be abandoned.

Let the prescribed thesis, then, be treated *à la Turretin*. And, while our friends are engaged in stating the question, explaining the terms, and constructing their syllogisms, in proof of the *affirmative*, we shall, in the mean time, employ ourselves in bringing forward our arguments in demonstration of the *negative*.

From the rejection of the applicant by Dr Symington, in the circumstances above supposed, there are just *three* conclusions which can possibly be deduced. Either, *first*, Dr Symington believes that an approval of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, in all its articles, and especially in its principles respecting civil government, is essential to constitute a man a visible Christian, and consequently to entitle him to a seat at the communion table. Or, *secondly*, Dr Symington believes that he has received a special commission from Christ, as a Reformed Presbyterian minister, to refuse ecclesiastical fellowship, even to many of those who are really entitled to be members in Christ's church, or who may be actual members of his church. Or, *thirdly*, Dr Symington is wrong, and is acting without a divine warrant, in precluding from communion in his congregation any of the visible disciples of Christ who may apply to him for admission.

We by no means believe that Dr Symington will

avow the first of these conclusions; inasmuch as this would be to avow a principle thoroughly Popish, and to unchurch all the churches in the world, his own excepted. This would be to say that there are none worthy of membership in the church of the living God, and of a seat at the Redeemer's table, but Reformed Presbyterians.

But the second conclusion Dr Symington undoubtedly holds. And it is here where we and our fathers have erred. It is here where the fallacy lies. And this is the fallacy which we shall now endeavour to expose. In making this attempt, we are well aware that we have undertaken a somewhat difficult task; and that we may find it a work of no small labour to dispel the delusion. When some potent error has taken possession of the mind, and especially when it has become epidemic, and at the same time hereditary, in certain classes of society, it will, like the strong man armed, retain its hold, until dislodged by the entrance of a counter first principle, whose axiomatic truth will, when once seen, compel assent.

We cannot for a moment suppose, that Christ has introduced the elements of schism into the very constitution of his church. But he has undoubtedly done so, if he has made it the duty of *one* of his ministers to refuse an applicant, and has made it the duty of *another* minister to receive that applicant. If it is the duty of Dr Symington to exclude any person from his communion, then it must be the duty of every minister in Glasgow, nay, of every minister of the visible church, to exclude him. And, on the other hand, if it is the duty of any one minister to receive that man, then it is the duty of Dr Symington and of every minister to receive

him. Christ is not divided. There are just, as we have said already, two classes of persons in the world—those that are entitled to membership in Christ's church, and those that are not; and every minister of Christ is bound by his authority to admit the former, and to reject the latter. This is a first principle. And any system of church politics which would set this aside, or modify it, must be unsound.

Hence, we feel persuaded, that the Reformed Presbyterians and the Seceders, in framing their constitutions, committed a great fundamental error in enacting their testimonies as a term of Christian communion. Whenever the church's testimony extends beyond those fundamental truths of Christianity which are essential \* to visible discipleship, it ought not to be a term of communion,—for this plain reason, that these extra articles may separate those who, on the ground of the qualifications which they possess in common, are bound to remain united in ecclesiastical fellowship, and to sit down together at the same communion table as they may have opportunity.

\* The distinction which we here employ, is not the distinction between what is essential and not essential to *salvation*—a distinction which lies far too deep among the mysteries of God to be subject to the cognisance of man. We are speaking of those things which are *essential to visible church-membership*. And unless the Head of the Church has given to his servants clear and definite instructions as to whom they are to admit, and whom they are to reject, he has left them in the dark as to the most solemn and responsible of all their duties. But he has given clear instructions. And he has given the same instructions to all his ministers. He has not given one class of instructions to Dr Symington, and another to Dr M'Crie, and another to Dr Candlish, and another to Dr Brown, and another to Dr Wardlaw. He has enjoined one and all of them, and every minister of the visible church, to receive into their fellowship, whenever he shall apply, any one of his visible disciples.

The Old Dissenters were justified in standing aloof from the church at the Revolution, not because many of the ministers and people, or all of them, held or even taught Erastian sentiments, but because by joining the church they would have subjected themselves to the practical operation of Erastianism. But these Old Dissenters were not content with being free from the practical effects of Erastianism, they entangled themselves in other respects, and, at the same time, most unwarrantably narrowed the door of admission to sealing ordinances among them as a church of Christ. It is not likely that they would have been troubled with applications for membership from theoretic Erastians; but if any such should have applied, they were bound by Christ's authority to admit such applicants, notwithstanding their Erastian sentiments—unless Erastian sentiments, like atheistic, and infidel, and socinian sentiments, disqualify a man from being a member of Christ's church.

Again, the Seceders were justified in leaving the Established Church, not because many of her ministers and members, or even all of them, held or even propagated opinions in favour of patronage; but because the yoke of patronage was lying on their necks, and because, moreover, they were gagged, when they presumed to murmur, and to protest against the tyranny, not of the state merely, but of the church.

But the Seceders were not content with being free from patronage and other practical usurpations on the conscience, they entangled themselves in other points, and narrowed the door of admission, and laid a great number of obstructions before it, which many of Christ's disciples, who had a right to admission to his church, might

not be able to get over. Those friendly to patronage would not likely have applied to Seceders for church privileges. But if any should have done so, for any reason—for convenience, or because they felt themselves specially edified by the Seceder minister in their locality—such persons were entitled to membership in that Secession congregation, simply on the ground of their visible Christianity.

Testimonies such as those published by the Reformed Presbyterians and Seceders, ought not to be placed at the *door* of Christ's church, to be subscribed or acceded to as the ground of admission; they ought to be suspended on the *loftiest tower* of the temple, for the assertion of the truths embodied in them, before the eyes both of the world without, and of the church within, and for the instruction of all in their nature and importance. But persons are to be admitted into the sanctuary, and to all its privileges, on principles far *fewer*, and far more *simple*, than those embraced in the Reformed Presbyterian and Secession Testimonies.

When parties are related to one another, the rights and duties of the one party are necessarily determined and defined by the rights and duties of the other. If persons are, on the ground of their visible Christianity, entitled to be members of the church, it must be their right and duty to ask admission on this ground. But if they have a right to admission on this ground, then their right and duty limits and determines the right and duty of the church. For it can never be the right of the church to deprive any man of his rights, nor can it be the duty of the church to lay any bar in the way of his immediately discharging his duty. But the church necessarily infringes on the rights of applicants, and im-

pedes them in the immediate performance of their duty, if she requires their approval, in order to their admission to their privileges, of articles which are not essential to their enjoyment of these privileges. It is wrong certainly to make people believe that it is necessary for them to know the *very existence* of many of the controversies referred to in the testimonies under consideration, and far less to know on what side the truth lies, in order to their sitting down at the Lord's table. A knowledge of these controversies, and of the truth respecting them, may be useful to make Christians well informed; but it is not necessary to their admission to the church, and their participating in the holy sacraments.

Let these testimonies, then, be removed from the station which they have no right to occupy; and let them be placed in that position which lawfully belongs to them, namely, that of assertory and didactic documents. This change would go far to rectify much of the confusion and disorder that have been introduced into the ecclesiastical system.

We are well aware, that the proposal that the several ecclesiastical sections should adopt the simple principle of visible discipleship as the sole term of admission, and thus remove their respective testimonies from the position of terms of communion, and place them in that of assertory and illustrative documents, will shock the deep-rooted prejudices and awaken the powerful opposition of many excellent persons, both ministers and members of these sections,—not less than the announcement of the Copernican system of the heavens shocked the prejudices and aroused the opposition of many of the Christian philosophers and divines at the time when

the announcement was made. To suggest that the several ecclesiastical bodies should drop their testimonies, around which they have been for ages revolving, as terms of communion and centres of attraction, and that they should all conglomerate on the simple principle of visible church-membership, and revolve as one body around the one *Sun of Righteousness*, will be deemed by many as bold and dangerous an innovation as the doctrine of the Copernican astronomers; which, while sweeping away all the whirlpools of ether, and the cycles, and the epicycles, and the crystalline spheres, of former philosophers, placed the sun in the centre, and exhibited the whole planetary system carried round solely by the influence of his all-powerful attraction.

The astronomical innovation did not merely awaken the wrath of the Church of Rome, and of the Inquisition,—learned and pious and grave Protestant divines buckled on their armour, and descended to the arena, in order to confute and put down the pestilent heresy. One of these champions, Amesius, supposed he had annihilated the whole by one most felicitous stroke; for he, with the most perfect gravity and solemnity, asserts that the Copernican system must be false, for the Scripture saith, not only that the sun riseth and goeth down, but that *he hasteth* to the place whence he arose. Some of our friends suppose that they can overturn the whole of our argumentation, on the subject before us, by merely giving utterance to the text, “Withdraw from every brother who walketh disorderly.” But what is the import of the apostolic injunction? The disorderly walking referred to, must undoubtedly be of such a character as to disqualify those who so walk for church-membership. For Paul can never be supposed to exhort those who



had a right to sit down at the Lord's table to withdraw from those who had the same right.

We see how, under the false philosophy of their age, or the incorrect notions that may be dominant in the class of society to which they belong, men of vigorous and acute minds will sometimes feel and express themselves in a mode that is perfectly ludicrous. We know some who have pronounced the joint communicating of the members of the Evangelical Alliance to be *an act of ecclesiastical profligacy*. Now, were these persons thoroughly enlightened in the simple principles that ought to regulate the communion of the saints, they might see that this expression, with all its point and emphasis, is just as void of truth and propriety as the saying of Amesius, to which we have above referred.

It may here be asked, Are we to drop our testimonies for most important articles of truth? We answer, By no means. It is the duty of the church, and of every portion of the church, and of every man, to endeavour to ascertain all truth, and to bear testimony to the truth when ascertained. The question is, What is the position which these testimonies may legitimately occupy? What is the warrantable mode of displaying and applying them? The testimony of the church is the index of the knowledge, purity, and faithfulness to which she may have attained at any particular period. This testimony may be more full, clear, and pointed at one period, and less so at another. And, besides, there may be much more unanimity of sentiment among the members of the church, in regard to many of the articles of her testimony, at one time than at another. But the testimony ought never to be made a term of communion,

and ought never to divide the church. And were it properly applied, it never could divide the church.

The Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Seceders may perhaps say,—But if our testimonies are not to be made terms of communion, how are they to be maintained? There is one mode (we do not say it is a warrantable mode, we shall hereafter show that it is not—we suggest it here merely for the sake of illustration), there is one mode in which these testimonies may be maintained, though they should cease to be terms of communion to the people. The ministers might be required to subscribe them, and thus the denominational distinctions might still be preserved. The bodies would remain very much in the same state as they have been, professing to maintain and propagate the principles of their testimonies, while they avowedly admitted all who might choose to apply to them simply on the ground of their visible Christianity.

This would not greatly alter our practice. It would merely render our practice and our avowed principles more coincident than they have hitherto been. For what has really been our practice? Let us be perfectly explicit and honest in this matter. What have we been doing? Have we not been admitting all good and respectable Christians, who applied to us on the ground of their Christianity, while we, at the same time, professed to require much higher qualifications for membership? Every intelligent and candid man must readily admit, that ninety-nine out of a hundred of our communicants do not and cannot give an enlightened approval to all the principles in our testimonies. Many of these principles relate to the most profound and intricate questions that can engage the attention of the human mind

—such as the character, mission, and functions of the state; the relations between the state and the church; the character and peculiarities of the Jewish theocracy; the measures of statesmen in effecting revolutions, and in framing the constitutions of nations, &c. It is utterly wrong to entangle the judgment, and the conscience too, of applicants for church-fellowship, by making them believe that a knowledge of these high matters is necessary to worthy communicating. Is every farm-servant, and every factory-girl, before they are admitted to the Lord's table, to give in their accession to a testimony embracing principles so numerous, various, and profound as these? In many such cases, is it not enough, "She knows her *Bible* true?" She may even know but few things in the Bible; but she knows this, that she is a sinner, and Christ is the Saviour of sinners; and she believes in her Saviour, and loves him.

We cannot but feel that there is much truth in all this. And hence, under this feeling, we have adopted certain subordinate and modifying principles of admission. One of these is, *That we receive applicants on their approving of our testimonies, so far as they understand them.* But here we introduce an indefinite variety of grounds of admission; for one person may understand but a small portion of our testimony, another may understand a little more, and a third more still;—so that on this principle we may have as many different grounds of admission, as we have members in our congregations. Another modifying principle is, *That we receive none who are opposed to any part of our testimony;* that is, we require applicants to approve of all they understand, and *not to disapprove of what they do not understand.* But how can they either approve or disapprove of what

they do not understand? For any thing they can know, all that lies in the *terra incognita* may be, in their estimation, erroneous, and such as they could not accede to. And in acting on this principle we commit this strange anomaly: we receive a person who is so ignorant as not to know that he disapproves of any of the principles in our testimony; while we reject another person, of equal Christian worth, who is so intelligent as to have difficulties about, or objections to, some of its principles.

There is something in the highest degree unsatisfactory in all this, and which calls for a thorough and candid investigation and immediate amendment. The ground of admission to Christ's church must be plain, clear, definite, uniform, and permanent. The Reformed Presbyterians and Original Seceders, then, might go on very much in the way they have been doing, viz., displaying their testimonies, and using all means to make all men see the truth and importance of their principles; while, at the same time, they avowedly receive into their fellowship all who apply, simply on their visible Christianity. If any man shall refuse to join them, because he knows that it is their object to disseminate the principles of their testimony, the responsibility, in this case, will lie with him. But if he is willing to join them, let them receive him on his credible profession; and then let them employ lectures, and classes, and catechisms, and every efficient method of intellectual training, to make their congregations well informed in all periods of church history, and in all the departments of church politics.

But we proceed now to prove that these testimonies, in all their principles, ought not to be made terms of ministerial, any more than of Christian, communion;

and hence ought not to be so applied, as to be grounds of denominational separation at all. Whatever profession of faith the church may require from candidates for the ministry, as a guarantee that they shall preach the gospel of the grace of God, none surely will affirm, that a subscription to all the articles in the testimonies under consideration is a necessary qualification for the sacred office. Something more comprehensive is all that can be demanded.

It will now be asked, if these testimonies are neither to be terms of communion for the people nor the ministers, how can they possibly be maintained? There is still another mode, and one which, being scriptural and warrantable, would be far more efficient than that which we have been hitherto employing. Let all the Presbyterians in Scotland unite on their common evangelism and common presbyterianism, and let it be distinctly understood and recognised, that all parties in the church have perfect freedom to publish all their peculiar principles, and to endeavour, by the clearness and force of their reasoning, to bring the whole church to adopt and recognise them; and when they have got a majority, to have them asserted by a judicial act of the supreme court.

This plan, we are aware, will on its first proposal be pronounced by many to be in the highest degree absurd and Utopian. We believe, notwithstanding, were they to give it their candid and patient consideration, they will find that it is perfectly scriptural, and the only plan consistent with the unity of the church, and the freedom of her members.

The church is the most simple association imaginable. Her elementary and essential principles are divine, and of paramount and universal interest. But they are few

and very simple ; and hence fitted, as they are designed, to unite men of all countries and of all classes of society ; and men, too, in whose opinions on philosophy, on politics, and even on many subjects connected with Christianity itself, there may be great diversity. Such is the church as exhibited in the New Testament ; but alas ! how has she been complicated, and disfigured, and deranged, by the passions and prejudices of men !

In some of the old editions of Descartes' works, there is a sheet or picture, on which is delineated his system of the universe—his architecture of the heavens ; and a truly gothic and grotesque style of architecture it is. The earth, of course, is placed where the earth should not be ; and the planets—one here and one there—are each surrounded by a great number of concentric circles, representing the whirlpools of ether, in which he had placed them, and by which he determined their positions and regulated their motions. This, we conceive, might afford an apt emblem of the church,—the ecclesiastical system, dismembered, deranged, and confounded, as it has been, by the ignorance, prejudice, and violence of men ;—while the simple diagram of the heavens, constructed on the principles of modern science, may be viewed as an emblem of the church, in her sublime simplicity, as presented to our view in the pages of the New Testament.

The late Dr M'Crie has somewhere asserted, that "the church is the freest of all commonwealths." In that saying, we believe, he refers chiefly to the church's absolute freedom from all foreign influence and control—to her spiritual independence. But there is a freedom of another kind which belongs to the church. She, by her constitution, secures the highest degree of *internal*

freedom—liberty of thought, speech, and action, to all her members, provided always their sentiments, language, and conduct, are not subversive of her essential principles. This is one of the grand principles of the Reformation. In the Reformation, there are two principles which stand out with special prominence. The *first* is the supreme and sole authority of the Bible, as the rule of faith. And the *second*, which flows necessarily from the first, is freedom of inquiry, with the right of private judgment. Hence, these are the principles which the Church of Rome has been ever labouring to subvert and suppress. But some Protestant churches seem, not unfrequently, to fall from these grand distinctive principles; and to manifest a large portion of the spirit of that church from which they have separated, and whose presumption and intolerance they so loudly condemn. Have not some Protestant sects, who make the highest profession of attachment to the principles of the Reformation, displayed, in regard to both these *primary articles*, a spirit essentially Popish. They have not avowedly, like the Church of Rome, but they have really and practically, elevated the Standards, the Confession of Faith, and the Testimony, to a place of authority equal to, if not above, the Sacred Scriptures. And they have done this in direct opposition to the doctrine of the Confession itself.

“The Supreme Judge,” says the Confession, (chap. i., sec. 10,) “by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

The ecclesiastical bodies to whom we have so frequently referred, profess the highest veneration for the Westminster Confession of Faith ; but they seem to remember that they have subscribed to every article in that document, except the primary one, which we have just quoted. Hence, they have collected and arranged an immense number of doctrines and principles, which they suppose they have ascertained to be in harmony with the Bible. Nay, they have judicially declared that these are in perfect accordance with Scripture, and have enacted the Testimony in which they are embodied "as a term of fellowship, ministerial and Christian." These principles thus settled are, it would seem, to be no more committed to innovation and debate; they are foundations never to be stirred; terms and conditions of the community, to which every member has engaged his fidelity, by virtue of a promise which he cannot recall. Consequently, should any member discover, or think he has discovered, that some of these principles are not agreeable to Scripture, and that others of them, though agreeable to Scripture, ought not to be imposed as terms of communion, he has no alternative but to leave the body. He is not permitted to appeal from the Testimony and the Confession to the Bible. The Synod declines and refuses to hear him on the ground of the Bible. He must be tried by the Testimony, and by the Testimony he must abide, or leave the body. In controversies relating to matters not in the Testimony, he is indeed at perfect liberty to appeal to the Bible. But as to all matters in the Testimony, the sentence of the Testimony itself is final. True, indeed, in relation to those who are *without*,—that is, those who are not their own members—these churches will condescend to argue

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all the principles of their Testimonies on the field of Scripture; but as to those *within*—their own members—every controversy must be settled on the arena of the Testimony.

We shall here quote, in proof of what we have now stated, a passage from a paper, which was read in the Synod of Original Seceders, was highly approved of by the Synod, and was published at the Synod's request :—  
“There are common principles in which we are agreed, and to which we are pledged, in respect of which difference of opinion is not allowed among us. But there are other points not judicially determined by the church, and therefore not included in her public profession, in respect of which mutual forbearance must be exercised. These things are still left open questions.”\* Now, all bodies who act in this manner are departing from the Reformation, and are, in spirit and in conduct, approximating that church from which they have separated. And they are at the same time violating the very principle to which they themselves have appended their subscription. For what does the Confession do? It expressly and constantly recognises an authority superior to itself. It recognises the supreme authority of the Bible. And hence it always subjects its own opinions to be tried by this divine standard. The Confession is surely not to be understood to say, that the Scripture is the supreme judge of all decisions of councils, all opinions, all doctrines, *except the decisions, opinions, and doctrines of the Westminster Confession*. The Confession recognises the supreme authority of Scripture. And when we subscribe it, we do so, of course, as making

\* Remarks on the Position and Principles of Original Seceders, &c., by the Rev. M. Murray.

this recognition. Now, what is implied in subscribing the Confession in this view of it? It implies that it is the right and privilege of every subscriber to move at any time in the Synod, that certain articles in the Testimony or Confession be brought to the standard of Scripture, and, if necessary, be explained, have the sentiments modified, and the language new cast; or, it may be, that certain articles be expunged altogether. And the Bible is to be acknowledged as the supreme judge of the propriety and necessity of these alterations. The Confession and Testimony are merely human statements about divine truth. And are these human statements, when once made, to be held supreme and unalterable? and is there to be no appeal, in regard to any article in them, to the divine and infallible standard of truth? The right of appeal ought always to be recognised. Nay, investigation ought to be encouraged. Every Assembly and Synod, being composed of fallible men, and remembering also, that all their predecessors were fallible men, ought, like the convention of Pennsylvania, to have a standing committee for the revision of the symbols. Again, when any minister or member is brought to trial for error, he is not to be tried by the Testimony and Confession alone, but by the divine authority which these standards ever acknowledge to be supreme. Some may think that such a mode of procedure would be somewhat strange and perplexing; and it may perhaps be difficult to understand and to work such a machinery. The difficulty arises from the *human* coming in contact with the *divine*. The matter and ground of the church's testimony are divine. But the form of the testimony, and the modes and acts by which it is displayed and maintained, are necessarily human. But the church's testimony must

never be so framed and applied as to interfere either with the supremacy of the Word of God, as the rule of faith and the judge of all controversies, or with freedom of inquiry and the right of private judgment on the part of the church's members. One great evil is, that these churches have judicially determined—that is, have made terms of communion of—a great many principles that ought ever to be open questions.

In the church, as in every society, the majority has its rights as well as individuals; but the rights of the majority, when properly exercised, can never interfere with the just rights of the minority; and, on the other hand, the rights of the minority can never interfere with those of the majority. Now, it is the duty and right of the majority, or the church, to assert and bear testimony to all the Bible truth she may have ascertained. But it is not the right of the church to excommunicate the minority who may not be able conscientiously to concur in the church's assertory acts; or, in other words, it is not the right of the church to make these assertory acts laws of the church, and terms of ministerial and Christian communion, and thus constrain the minority to separate.

Neither is it the duty or right of the minority to separate from the church, because she has exercised her right in asserting what she believes to be truth.

We shall bring out our meaning more fully and clearly by an illustration, and we may take any important doctrine or principle for this purpose. For example; were the advocates of the doctrine of the pre-millennial advent to become the majority, they might find it their duty to give their sentiments on that subject all the weight of a judicial sanction, and conse-

quently assert the doctrine by an act of the supreme court. But *here the right of the majority terminates*. They have no right to make that act a term of communion. On the other hand, it would be the right of the minority to oppose the resolution, in all the stages of its course; and when the act was passed, it would still be their right to mark their dissent, and also from the press, or any other legitimate mode, to oppose the doctrine as they had been doing before; and at the same time to use all constitutional means to have the act rescinded. But *in measures such as these, the right of the minority terminates*. They have no right to separate. In course of time, the minority might become the majority. Then it would be their right to rescind the former act, and to assert their own view of the question, but not to make this a term of communion, and thus a ground of separation; neither has the other party a right to separate, because their act has been rescinded, and the opposite doctrine judicially asserted.

Now, there are multitudes of questions which ought, we think, to be treated in this manner; and among these are to be included the questions which divide the Presbyterian bodies in Scotland—the Established Church not excepted; that is, provided always that she places her distinguishing peculiarities in the category of speculative opinions; so that other parties, uniting with her, would not be brought under their practical operation: or, to be even more explicit, provided she would renounce her connection with the state, in order to accomplish the glorious object of combining in one united church all the Presbyterians in Scotland, on their common evangelism and presbyterianism.

But leaving the Established Church to ponder on this

proposal, we address ourselves to the other Presbyterian bodies in Scotland. And we do this with the greater hope, inasmuch as the differences among them are speculative, not practical. In regard to government, the practice of the Reformed Presbyterians is the same as that of the other bodies. And in regard to endowments, the practice of all the other bodies is the same as that of the United Presbyterians.

The peculiar principles of the Reformed Presbyterians are not warrantable grounds of separation. The adoption of them is not necessary to qualify a man for being either a member or minister in Christ's church, and therefore they can never be a scriptural ground of separation among Christ's members and ministers. How absurd and unwarrantable would it be for us to have a *Tory* church of Christ, and a *Whig* church of Christ; so that the one would exclude from her membership and her ministry all Whigs, and the other, in like manner, exclude all Tories. But what did the Reformed Presbyterians and the Seceders do, but just perpetrate this absurdity? The Reformed Presbyterians embodied in their testimony their peculiar glosses on Romans xiii. 1-7, Titus iii. 1, and the parallel passages where kings and magistrates are spoken of, and they excluded from church-fellowship, and from the ministry, all who could not subscribe to these glosses. And, on the other hand, the Seceders embodied in their testimony their comments on the same passages, and excluded from the Lord's table, and from the ministry, all who could not adopt their interpretations. All this was, without all question, most unwarrantable, unless on the supposition that the Reformed Presbyterian views, on the one hand, or those of the Seceders, on the other, were of such a

heretical character, as to form a scriptural ground for excision from the church of God, and of deposition from the ministry. Hence, the peculiarities of these two bodies ought to be transferred from the position which they have too long held—that of grounds of separation—and placed in the list of speculative questions, and ought to be treated in the manner we have suggested above, namely, like the question relating to the second advent of the Redeemer.

Again, the peculiar principles of the Original Seceders ought not to be grounds of separation, because an adoption of these is not necessary to entitle a person to be a member or minister in Christ's church.

The question which agitated the General Associate Synod, and which issued in the *breach*, in 1806,—namely, the question relating to the magistrate's power *circa sacra*,—ought never to have divided the church. It was very natural that such a question should arise at the time it did. From the period when the Westminster Confession had been compiled, much light had been thrown on the science of politics, and on the character and functions of the state, by the works of Sydney, Locke, and other distinguished political writers, and also by the grand political events which had taken place, especially the Revolutions in England and France, and the erection of the Transatlantic Republic. It was not wonderful, then, that many should begin to doubt whether the compilers of the Confession had perfectly correct views about the proper and simple mission of the state, and whether the doctrine taught in certain of its chapters was in perfect harmony with the real spiritual independence of the church, or even to doubt whether it is the business of the state to legislate in favour of any

particular profession of religion ; and hence to wish to have the language of the standards new cast and simplified. All this, we say, was just what might have been expected in the circumstances. And, on the other hand, it was not surprising that the late Professor Bruce of Whitburn, and the late Dr M'Crie, and others, whose sentiments had been greatly moulded by the opinions and times of Knox, Melville, and Henderson, and who, moreover, had been personally pledged to the principles of the first Secession Testimony, should have scrupled to renounce their principles, by adopting the Narrative and Testimony as a term of ministerial and Christian communion.

What ought the General Associate Synod to have done in this case? They ought certainly to have remained *united*, and to have gone on with their proper work as a church of Christ, preaching the gospel, and administering all divine ordinances, for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints ; and to have made the question of the magistrate's power *circa sacra* an open question, giving full freedom for each party to endeavour, by the clearness and force of their arguments, to convince their brethren and the whole world on which side the truth lay. This, however, they did not do. The spirit of division was abroad and active ; and when new sentiments arose, new sects arose.

The New Light ministers and people were as really ministers and members of Christ's church as the Old Light, and *vice versa* ; why, then, should any principle, that did not affect their status as ministers and members of the church of God, have been made a ground of separation, especially when both parties held the same form of church government? That schism, like all others of

the same kind, severed ecclesiastically the nearest relations and the most intimate friends. We knew two brothers, both of them men of the highest respectability in society, on account of their public and private virtues, and both equally distinguished for every Christian excellence; but one of them was an Old Light and the other a New Light; therefore, though united by the tenderest and holiest of ties—by the bonds of nature and of grace—these two brothers could not sit down at the same visible communion table, and eat together of the same spiritual meat, and drink of the same spiritual drink. The reason was, that the one made the Old Light view, and the other made the New Light view, of the *circa sacra* question a term of communion. So that the one would not sit at the same communion table with him who was his brother by nature and by grace, unless that brother should, like himself, hold the Old Light view; and the other, in like manner, would not sit at the same communion table with him who was the child of the same earthly parent, and of the same heavenly Father with himself, unless he would hold the New Light view. We knew also two brothers, of equally high moral and religious character, separated in the same way, in consequence of the one holding the Reformed Presbyterian view, and the other holding the Seceder view, of the question about the character of the present British Government. We ask, Are there any premises, and is there any process of reasoning, by which this system of church politics can be defended—by which it can be shown that either the one brother or the other was justified in making diversity of opinion on these questions a ground of separation? If there is, let it be brought forth and clearly exhibited, that we may see and understand it;



and, if nothing of the kind can be produced, then let us have a radical and an immediate change. Let us have the whole of our church politics revised and remodelled, and brought to something like a fixed science.

It will be easily perceived, that the question about the continued obligation of the covenants ought not, in our estimation, to be a term of communion; but ought to be treated in the way we have suggested above, when referring to the doctrine of our Lord's second advent. Hence there is not, in our opinion, warrantable ground of separation between the Free Church and the Original Secession.

It will also be evident from our statements, in reference to the breach in the General Associate Synod, that we hold the voluntary question an unwarrantable ground of separation. The principle of Establishments is held theoretically by the Free Church, the Reformed Presbyterians, and the Original Seceders; but it ought no longer to keep them separate from the United Presbyterians. When embodied in an actual Establishment, the principle may be a ground of separation. Indeed, it must be so to all who cannot conscientiously connect themselves with any established church; and from the character of the Establishment that may at any time be set up, it may prove such, even to those who hold the scripturalness of national churches. But as an abstract principle, it ought not to be a ground of separation. We are all practical voluntaries. Let us unite in our *practice*; and we may have long years of union and of united comfort and usefulness before we be split by any large number of us joining the Establishment that presently exists, or any that may be hereafter erected.

We have heard some Free Church people say, that

there is an insuperable objection to their joining with the United Presbyterians, inasmuch as the two parties could not co-operate in some of the great practical questions of the day ; such as the Sabbath cause, and the opposition to Popery. But we would ask, Is diversity as to the mode of promoting Sabbath sanctification and of opposing Popery a sufficient reason for dividing the church ? Let evil of every kind be opposed vigorously and perseveringly until it is put down and entirely removed. And let all that can oppose any evil on one principle and in one mode, combine in so opposing it ; and let others that can oppose it on another principle and in another mode, combine in opposing it in their way. But in opposing and putting down one evil, let us not produce or perpetuate another. *Let us not divide the church.* Diversity of sentiment exists in the Free Church on many important questions ; for instance, on the doctrine of our Lord's second advent. But it would be utterly wrong, surely, to divide on this question, and to erect a *Premillennial-Advent Free Church*, and a *Post-millennial-Advent Free Church*.

Moreover, the ministers and members of the Free Church entertain different views on the question of national education. But though this is a practical question, it is no justifiable ground for separation. Neither are diversities of opinions and of measures, in putting down Sabbath desecration and in opposing Popery, any reason why we should remain separate.

Where conflicting forms of church government exist, these, of course, must constitute a practical obstacle to incorporation. Church government cannot be an open question, because it is a practical matter. All must of necessity adopt one or other of the forms. Therefore,

until God shall be pleased to enlighten the several parties on this subject, and bring them all to adopt one form of ecclesiastical polity, the distinctions of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents must continue. But even while this may be the case, there may be much Christian and ministerial fellowship among these churches. All ministers and Christians who believe and act on the principles of the gospel, are one, are united,—visibly united, by bonds that are divine and indissoluble. Though they have adopted different modes of administering the external affairs of the church, the ministers of these different churches may, we should think, officiate with and for one another. And there may also be much Christian fellowship among the people, as opportunities in providence are afforded. Of course, every thing of this kind must be regulated by Christian prudence, and by the principle of doing all things to edification. We by no means hold the question of church government to be one of trivial interest. There are two grand principles which we believe it is of the highest importance to maintain, viz., the unity of the church, and the parity of official authority in all her ministers. And the best mode of working these principles must be the best and most scriptural form of ecclesiastical government. Differences, however, even on this practical matter, need not preclude all intercourse between the ministers and members of churches diversely constituted.

But the churches in Scotland, for whose immediate union we would earnestly plead, have all one form of church government. They are all Presbyterians, and hence there is no obstacle, on this head, to their incorporation.

As a preliminary to the union, there must of necessity be a thorough revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith. And is it not full time that this should be undertaken? If the State of Pennsylvania proposed the revision of her constitution every two years, surely after a lapse of two hundred years we may be warranted to bring the doctrines and opinions of the Westminster Confession to that divine standard, which the Confession itself recognises as the supreme judge of the opinions and doctrines of all men, and have them thoroughly examined and compared with this standard.

The Westminster Confession of Faith was compiled to be a *platform of union and uniformity* among all the churches. But it has not proved to be a bond of union. And one reason why it has not united the churches is, that it demands too much *uniformity*. Its articles are too numerous and multifarious. Perhaps, had the political events which took place after the rising of the Westminster Assembly not occurred, the churches might have united, and might have remained for some time united, on the basis of the Confession. But this document could not have been a permanent bond of union. In the progress of political science, questions about the simple mission of the state, and about the real independence of the church, must have arisen. And these questions would have either set aside the Confession, as a basis of union, or would have divided the churches. The Secession continued for a while united on the Westminster standards. But the questions to which we have referred divided the Secession. And though the three kingdoms had been as much united on the Westminster standards as the Secession at one time was, they must have been ecclesiastically

divided by the same questions which split the Secession.

The Confession is, we humbly apprehend, too large and too complex a document, to be a scriptural term of admission to the office of the ministry in any church. Besides, is there not reason to conclude that the Confession may not be quite self-consistent in all its articles?

The late Dr M'Crie, and Dr Cunningham, have employed all their high talents, all their logical acumen, in order to harmonise the language and sentiments of chapters xx. xxiii. and xxxi., with the real and proper spiritual independence of the church. But it may perhaps be doubted whether they have succeeded in their object; because it may be doubted whether the distinctions and explanations of the commentators exhibit the real views and sentiments of the original compilers. The learned almost uniformly approach this subject in a spirit, if not entirely, yet very much, akin to that in which we address ourselves to the task of reconciling the apparent contradictions of Scripture. They seem to believe that there is, and must necessarily be, an undoubted harmony among all the parts and passages of the Confession. And hence they have put forth their whole energy in an attempt to bring out and exhibit this perfect accordance. But have they done any thing more than to impress a form on certain passages which they cannot retain?

"This part of the Confession," says the Original Secession Testimony, when commenting on the 3d section of the 23d chapter,—“this part of the Confession must be understood in a consistency with other parts of it, where the freedom and independence of the church upon the powers of this world are asserted and vindicated.” But, notwithstanding the strong and long-cherished reluctance

to make the admission, it is possible that this part of the Confession may not be perfectly consistent with other parts, and with the freedom and independence of the church. There may be in the Confession contradictions, not apparent merely, as in the Bible, but real, and such as no ingenuity can reconcile. Notwithstanding all the comments and explanations which have been given, there arise, ever and anon, in all the churches professing adherence to the Westminster Standards, serious difficulties, and conscientious scruples in regard to the chapters of the Confession above referred to. This is the case in Scotland, in America, and in Ireland. The truth is, that these chapters never have given, and we believe never can give, satisfaction. The very fact that these chapters of the Westminster Confession of Faith have been the cause of so much controversy and division, and have required so much elucidation, is an urgent reason why they should now be candidly re-examined, and their sentiments and language re-modelled, so as to render them really and evidently consistent with the other parts of the Confession, and the independence of the church. Chapters and sections, which require long, and learned, and ingenious explanations, are unsuited to ecclesiastical symbols, which, of all documents, ought to be characterised by the highest possible degree of perspicuity.

We have repeatedly referred to the provision made by the State of Pennsylvania for the revision of the constitution. But there is a case still more in point, viz., the practice of the Reformed Church of France. The Synod of that church from time to time explained, altered, and amended their articles and canons, just as the British Parliament is every session altering and amending the

constitution and the laws of the kingdom. And there is no other way of treating properly constitutions and laws made by uninspired men, whether these relate to the state or to the church. In England, however, and also in Scotland, there seems to have been an impression that the ecclesiastical constitutions, with their articles of religion and confessions of faith, were fixed immutably, and were never to be subjected to "innovation or debate;" and hence the consequence is, that while all the good in these constitutions has been stereotyped, all the evil has been stereotyped also.

Is there any necessity or propriety in adhering for ever to the language and sentiments of the Confession of Faith on a subject which, it must be confessed, was not distinctly understood at the time of the Westminster Assembly? The enlightened men of that age knew that "God alone is the Lord of the conscience." They knew also that the church is a spiritual society, and therefore ought to be spiritually independent of the state. But they were not able to define the powers and functions of the civil magistrate, so as to secure liberty of conscience to all men, and maintain the spiritual independence of the church. A mist hung over the boundary-line between things civil and ecclesiastical, which they could not dispel. Of the truth of this statement we have a most convincing evidence in the language employed in the 20th and 23d chapters of the Confession of Faith.

Besides, in carrying out the object of the Solemn League, by endeavouring to effect the union of the churches, we are under no obligation, either primary or superadded, to adhere to the phraseology, or even to all the sentiments of the Confession, as a basis of union. We have reason to doubt whether the object of the

Solemn League, and the character of the Westminster Standards, as a basis of union, and especially the concern of the Church of Scotland with these standards, are matters distinctly understood by certain parties. What were, and what are, the facts of the case?

Scotland and England, and part of Ireland, in 1643, entered into a solemn confederation to resist the arbitrary measures of Charles I., and to establish the principles of civil and religious liberty in the three kingdoms, and at the same time to endeavour to effect an ecclesiastical union and uniformity in church government, doctrine, and discipline, in these realms.

In order to accomplish this latter object of the Solemn League, a joint-committee was appointed to draw up a basis of union for the consideration of the parties purposing to unite. The English portion of this committee, which was by far the largest, had been appointed by the Parliament; the individual members were all nominated, and the chairman appointed, by an ordinance of the Lords and Commons. And the Scottish portion, which was very small, was appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Having finished their labours, the joint-committee brought forward their report, or, in other words, the basis of union, viz., the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Propositions for Church Government, and Directory for Public Worship. The Westminster Assembly could give neither civil nor ecclesiastical authority to this basis. They were merely a committee. And hence, in bringing it forward, they virtually said to the several parties, "Here is a basis on which we think the churches might unite. Are you pleased with it?" The English Parliament was not pleased with it. They



declined to set up and recognise as an Established Church one constructed on the plan proposed by the Assembly.

When the basis was laid before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, they were very much satisfied with it; and, with certain limitations and explanations, they declared themselves willing to unite with the other churches on this basis.\* At this point, owing to the political convulsions which immediately succeeded, the negotiations for union were suspended, or rather terminated.

Now, what was the understanding of the Church of Scotland on the subject of union at this stage of the procedure? Is she to be regarded as saying, "We have made our explanations on this basis of union, transmitted to us by the joint-committee, and we have thus fixed it; and every union that may hereafter take place must be effected by the other parties uniting with us on this basis, with our explanations and limitations, while no farther change is to be made upon it?" The Church of Scotland is never surely to be understood as speaking in this spirit. Had the negotiations for union continued after the rising of the Westminster Assembly, or had they been renewed during the Commonwealth, or after the Restoration, the basis of union would undoubtedly have been transmitted from party to party, until, by mutual explanations, they had all agreed upon it. And though Scotland, after violating the Solemn League by

\* "The General Assembly doth, therefore, after mature deliberation, agree unto, and approve the said Confession, as to the truth of the matter; and also as to the point of uniformity, agreeing *for our part* that it be a common Confession of Faith for the three kingdoms."—*Act of Assembly, August 27th, 1647, approving the Confession of Faith.*

the military expedition into England, commonly called the Duke of Hamilton's engagement, renewed that sacred bond, and pledged herself still, so far as in her lay, to endeavour to effect the projected union on the Westminster Standards, which by this time had been framed, and had been agreed upon by the General Assembly; yet this renovation of the League, and solemn profession of adherence to the standards, can never be understood as binding up the Church of Scotland from making additional alterations on this basis, in the event of future proposals for union.

No church can be under any obligation, on any ground whatever, to retain error, or even inaccuracy or obscurity of language, in her symbols. These things are diseases in the ecclesiastical system, and therefore must be, more or less, injurious; and hence they ought to be removed as speedily and completely as possible. We find, as we have said, the Reformed Church of France often amending her articles. And, be it remembered, these were articles to which every member had solemnly pledged himself. From the Acts of the Synods, we learn that one of the first things they did when met, was to propose some explanation or alteration on some article in the Confession, or on some of the canons.

To give an example or two:—In the 3d section of the 2d chapter of the Acts of the Seventeenth National Synod, “the provinces are exhorted seriously to debate in their Synods how to word the five-and-twentieth article of our Confession, and to bring with them their maturest thoughts about it unto the next National Synod.” And in the 2d chapter of the Nineteenth National Synod, “upon the 14th article, the provinces are exhorted to study whether it were not expedient to take

away those particular expressions which mention the heresies of Servetus, and to acquiesce in a general detestation of his errors, and the rather because they be now extinct and buried in oblivion.”\* These are merely specimens, which show the spirit and mode of ecclesiastical legislation in that church.

Why, then, should not the Presbyterians in Britain, Ireland, and America—who, notwithstanding their divisions and differences, all continue to cherish, as they ought certainly to do, the highest veneration for the Westminster Standards—meet or negotiate, in order to come to some agreement in regard to these chapters in the Confession which have occasioned our divisions? These might either be remodelled, or the questions to which they refer might be declared to be open questions, and hence no longer grounds of separation among friends of the Westminster Standards.

It is with the highest satisfaction that we here introduce a few quotations from the address delivered by the Rev. Dr Candlish at the Bicentenary of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, held at Edinburgh, July 1843, “on the importance of adhering to scriptural standards, and aiming at union on that basis.” Some of the quotations may serve as a defence and illustration of the sentiments which we have repeatedly advanced in some of the earlier portions of this essay; and they bear particularly on the point of the discussion at which we are now arrived.

“We are warranted,” Dr Candlish observes, in the address referred to, “to say, that the confession adopted by any church is not to be regarded as essentially fixed and stereotyped in all ages. On the contrary, these

\* Quick's Synodicon, vol. i. pp. 227 and 312.

confessions ought to be regarded as expressions of the mind of the church at the time,—as the very subsisting minds of the society declared from time to time, and brought to bear with special emphasis on the prevailing errors of successive ages. In this point of view, we are called upon to maintain that confessions adopted by a fallible church are capable of enlargement and correction,—that additions may unquestionably be made to them, and alterations made upon them, not for the purpose of changing the truth of God or the church's faith, but for the purpose, it may be, of bringing out that faith more explicitly, and in more pointed contradiction to errors prevailing at the time.

“And here it occurs to me to remark, that as the church is not a voluntary association, but a divine institute, subject to God, and having no authority over conscience,—having no right to do as she pleases, but only to carry out the will of God,—the church is not entitled to take her stand simply upon her confession, as if that were the ultimate judge in any controversy that may arise. If the church were a mere voluntary association, or a mere society of individuals, associated spontaneously for certain purposes, on certain terms, then the church might be entitled to take peremptory ground, and say, ‘You will not consent to our terms, and therefore we will not admit you into our society.’ But if the church be a divine institute, appointed and ordained by God, then she is bound to act on the principle that all have a right of admission to the church, unless she can show cause to the contrary from the Word of God. Hence, beyond all doubt, if an allegation be made by any individual to any church, that certain points in their articles and standards are contrary

to the Word of God, she is bound to listen to the allegation, she is bound to look into the matter; she is also bound, if she is satisfied that the articles are erroneous, to make the required change. She is not at liberty merely to take her stand upon the undoubted privilege of a voluntary association, and say, 'We are entitled to associate ourselves on any conditions we choose; and if you do not like our conditions, you need not join our society.' No; the church, as a divine institute, as the church of the living God, is bound to open her doors to all believers. The church is bound always to act as if she were the sole church of all Christendom; and if any man alleges that there are errors in her standards, it is not enough for her to say, 'These are the conditions of our fellowship, and if you disapprove of our conditions, disown our fellowship.' No; he has a right to our fellowship, unless we can show that the conditions which exclude him are lawful and scriptural."

Now, all this is very candid; and it is a declaration which some of the devotees of the Westminster Standards would have felt the strongest reluctance to make. And therefore we have to thank Dr Candlish for his manly honesty. But it is one thing to make a general declaration of this kind, and it is another thing to act upon it in particular instances;—even as it is one thing for a man to acknowledge that he ought to examine into his conduct, confess his sins, and abandon them; and a very different thing for that man actually to begin the work of self-examination, to acknowledge, on discovery, that certain parts of his conduct are contrary to God's law, and immediately to make the practical changes.

The adherents of the standards, who have hitherto

examined the chapters "against which allegations have been made," appear to have entered on the business rather with a predetermination, if able, to defend them, than with a resolution candidly to acknowledge, on sufficient evidence, the errors they may contain, and to propose the necessary alterations. This is undoubtedly true of the late Dr M'Crie, and of Dr Cunningham, as we have stated above. And it is true also of Dr Shaw, in his "Exposition of the Confession of Faith," and of Dr Hetherington, in his Introductory Essay prefixed to that work.

"The mind of man," says Dr Hetherington, "never produced a truer or nobler proposition than the following :—' God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines of men, which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.' The man who can comprehend, entertain, and act upon that principle, can never arrogate an overbearing and intolerant authority over the conscience of his fellow-man, much less wield against him the weapons of remorseless persecution."

The truth and force of this observation we readily admit. But while this truly noble proposition sanctified and softened the heart, so that those who entertained it and acted upon it could not employ the weapons of remorseless persecution, it did not all at once rectify the other conceptions of the judgment, and enable those who gave utterance to it to lay down clearly the principles of toleration. The hearts of the men both of the first and second Reformation, purified by some grand leading truths, were much more liberal than their judgments. Hence, while it was the decided judgment of Knox that the idolater (and among idolaters he included

Papists, the worshippers of the host) should die the death, he never acted on that judgment. Accordingly, his biographer observes, "that while the reformers maintained that idolatry ought to be punished by death, they discovered no disposition to proceed to capital punishment, even when it was completely in their power." "I never read or heard," he adds, "of an instance, in the time of our reformer, of a person being put to death for performing any part of the Roman Catholic worship. If the reason of this disconformity between their opinion and their practice be asked, it may be answered,—their aversion to blood."\*

The members of the Westminster Assembly had much more clear and enlarged views of the principles of toleration than the earlier Reformers. The persecuting principles of Knox and his contemporaries arose chiefly from "their holding the untenable opinion, that Christian nations are bound to enact the same penalties against all breaches of the moral law, which were enjoined by the judicial laws of the Jews." Now, this opinion the Westminster Assembly theoretically repudiates; hence the doctrine of the 4th section of the 19th chapter of the Confession of Faith—"To them (the people of Israel), also as a body-politic, God gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now, further than the general equity thereof may require."

Now, we ask what is the doctrine taught in this section of the Confession of Faith? It is this,—that the judicial law, as a law, has now no authority whatever over nations and their rulers; and that if any of its principles ought now to be acted upon by bodies-politic,

\* See Dr M'Crie's "Life of John Knox," vol. ii. p. 129.

it is not owing to these principles being in the judicial law, but owing to their being the principles of natural and universal equity, and such as would be obligatory in whatever document they might be found, and though the judicial law had never been promulgated. In this section, the Confession places the judicial law, in point of present authority, on the same level with the laws of Solon, or those of Lycurgus, or those of the Twelve Tables, or those of any human code whatever.

But how sadly confused and self-contradictory were the sentiments of the Westminster divines, great and good men as they most undoubtedly were, on the powers and functions of the civil magistrate. For while they here set aside the authority of the judicial law, how do they afterwards prove the doctrine of the 4th section of the 20th chapter, viz., that "for publishing such opinions as are contrary to the known principles of Christianity, men may be proceeded against by the power of the civil magistrate?" Their proofs are drawn from the acts of Jewish kings and others, in punishing and putting to death idolaters and teachers of error,—which acts were justifiable and warrantable in these persons solely because they were enjoined by the judicial law to perform them; but which acts would be utterly unjustifiable now, seeing that the judicial law has "expired," and seeing that these acts are not required by the principles of natural and universal equity.

Of the same kind are the proofs adduced in defence of the doctrine taught in the 23d chapter. These consist in references to the acts of Jewish kings and rulers in regulating and reforming religion among the Jews; and in enforcing the observance of the ordinances of the church; and in punishing those who despised or who



neglected these sacred institutions;—all which acts were performed by these kings and rulers, either by the immediate direction of God, or in the administration of the judicial law; which judicial law was a divine and supernatural institute, for the purpose of enforcing, by civil pains and penalties, all the precepts of the moral, and all the rites of the ceremonial law.

What is really the doctrine of the 4th section of the 20th chapter of the Confession, taken in connection with the proofs adduced? It is this:—That as the Jewish magistrate proceeded against those who taught opinions and maintained practices contrary to the known principles of Judaism, so the civil magistrate, in countries where the people are professing Christians, may proceed against those who publish opinions and maintain practices contrary to the known principles of Christianity. And as infidel and Socinian opinions are contrary to the known principles of Christianity, therefore, infidel and Socinian writers may be proceeded against by the power of the civil magistrate.

We do not enter farther at present on the discussion of this subject. We have made these remarks chiefly for the purpose of showing that the chapters in the Confession referred to ought to be subjected to a thorough revision. We have expressed ourselves strongly on this subject; and we have been emboldened to do so for this reason,—that we, for many years, were in the habit of defending these chapters of the Confession of Faith, and of quoting the late Dr M'Crie's explanations as a sufficient ground of defence. But we are now convinced that the explanations are unsatisfactory, and that the chapters are indefensible, and we deem it our duty to announce our convictions.

In the address above referred to, Dr Candlish dwells on the importance of aiming at union on the basis of sound scriptural standards. He proposes that the deliberations and consultations of the Westminster Assembly should be resumed at that stage at which the mutual coalescence, or the tendency to coalesce, of the different parties was most manifestly interrupted. He asks, Why have the evangelical churches been standing aloof, and frowning as from a distance at each other? Why should they not come together in an amicable conference, if by any means they can do so, and perhaps they will find that they agree more fully at bottom than they imagined? "I should," he says, "most heartily rejoice if, in consequence of this commemoration, there should take place periodical or yearly meetings of the several evangelical churches, uniting in a protest against prevailing errors, for mutual consultation, for the revision of their several codes of opinion, and for endeavouring to come to a common understanding." These are most valuable suggestions; and why are they not acted upon? Why are they not carried into effect? We allow long years to elapse without taking any decided steps or adopting any practical measures.

Let us have an Assembly similar in character to that which met 200 years ago at Westminster, and having the same grand object, the uniting of the churches. Let it be convened, say at Tanfield, not, however, by an ordinance of Parliament, but by the spontaneous requisition of the several ecclesiastical bodies, and let this Assembly take up the Westminster Standards in the state in which they were left when the negotiations for union were suspended; and let all candidly examine what farther alterations may be requisite, and let these be made accordingly.

Let us adopt various plans and measures—every legitimate and habile plan and measure—for promoting Christian and ecclesiastical union. Let the Evangelical Alliance go on zealously with its work, and diffuse the influence which it is fitted to diffuse, as constantly and widely as possible. But let us, at the same time, have an association with an object much more definite than that of the Evangelical Alliance, viz., the effecting of incorporation to as great an extent as may be possible in present circumstances.

In particular, let an association be formed, consisting of representatives from the four Presbyterian bodies in Scotland, viz., the Free Church, the United Presbyterians, the Reformed Presbyterians, and the Original Seceders. Let the object of the association be the incorporation of these bodies. And let the association labour with all intelligence, prudence, candour, zeal, and perseverance, until the end is accomplished. These churches are all united already in the subject of ecclesiastical government. But besides church government, there are three things which will necessarily engage the attention of the joint-committee:—*First*, the ground on which applicants for church-membership are to be admitted; *secondly*, the grounds on which candidates for the ministry are to be admitted; and *thirdly*, the testimony of the church.

It has been a maxim in some of these bodies that the testimony of the church ought to be the term of communion, Christian and ministerial, in the church. We feel persuaded, however, that were this maxim closely and candidly examined, it will be found to be unsound. It must operate injuriously, in one or other of two ways. It must either, on the one hand, greatly narrow the

church's testimony ; or, on the other, exclude many who are entitled to be members and ministers, and thus be a ground of separation. Now, we think, as we have already hinted, there is a mode of constructing and applying the testimony so as to secure most efficiently all the ends for which it ought to be displayed, and, at the same time, not to divide the church. The testimony is the index of the attainments of the majority.

In his address at the Bicentenary, to which we have repeatedly referred, Dr Candlish expatiates, with great justice and propriety, on the importance of the church's testimony being full and particular, precise and pointed, embracing ample statements, defences, and illustrations of divine truth, and thus condescending on the details, as well as on the broad and general principles, of the Christian system, and always confronting and opposing the various forms and shades of error that may happen to arise or prevail at any particular period. Now, all this is most proper, useful, and even necessary, in the church's testimony, viewed as an assertory, didactic, and illustrative document. But great amplitude, complication, and minuteness of statement (made of necessity in the language of uninspired and fallible men) are not necessary or suitable in the grounds of admission to the membership of the church, or even to the office of the ministry. Such grounds ought to be stated in language brief, clear, and comprehensive, so that there might be no doubt as to the meaning of the terms.

It is the right and privilege of the church (and by the church we here understand the majority) to state, defend, and illustrate, divine truth, in the mode, and in the style, which she believes to be most efficient and appropriate. But it is not her right and privilege to re-

quire of her members, or even her ministers, a formal and solemn approval of every statement and of every phrase and word in her Testimony. Hence, Confessions of Faith, and Testimonies, when large, embracing a vast number and variety of articles, stated and illustrated with much fulness and minuteness, must, if made terms of communion, necessarily entangle the conscience and thus often defeat their object. Accordingly, the Westminster Confession (chap. xxxi. sect. 4) explicitly declares, that seeing "all synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both." The church is bound, by the authority of her Divine Head, to admit to her membership, whenever they shall apply, all who possess the qualifications of visible discipleship; and she is bound also, by the same authority, to admit to the office of the ministry, whenever they apply, all who possess the scriptural qualifications of ministers of the gospel of the grace of God.

Dr Candlish seems to have felt that the church's testimony ought not to be a term of communion. Hence, when he states that the church is called upon to make her standards, and her Confession of Faith, full and particular, precise and pointed, he states in the same sentence, that the church is not generally justified in limiting the benefits of her communion to those who may adhere to her standards. That is a most important and true saying, in the quotation which we have made above from Dr Candlish's address. "The church is bound always to act, as if she were the sole church of all Christendom." If this maxim were adopted and acted upon, it would bring back the church to her scriptural

simplicity and would thus go far to unite the church—to make all those sections of the church, that have a right to be regarded as such, the sole church in Christendom. There is another statement in the same quotation, which, if acted upon, would correct many errors and practical evils in our ecclesiastical policy—viz. that “the church being a divine institute, has no right to do as she pleases, but is bound to act on the principle that all have a right of admission”—(and this must apply to admission to her ministry as well as to her membership)—“unless she can show cause to the contrary from the Word of God.”

This maxim has been disregarded and violated by many churches. And as in many, if not all, political constitutions, unwarrantable tests and qualifications are required in order to admission to offices in the state,—so in most, if not all, ecclesiastical constitutions, unwarrantable tests and qualifications are required in order to admission to offices in the church.

Any church—the Free Church for example—is fully warranted in adopting and acting upon the Presbyterian form of church government. She must of necessity adopt some form of government. And she must feel herself bound to adopt that form which she believes to be most in harmony with God’s Word, and best fitted to bring into operation the grand fundamental principles of the constitution of the church. She is also justified in asserting in her testimony whatever she believes to be divine truth. If any minister of Christ or any candidate for ordination shall decline to join the Free Church because her government is Presbyterian, and because she has asserted such and such principles in her testimony, the responsibility, in this case, will lie with these per-

sons themselves. But if any minister of Christ is ready to accede to the Free Church, and practically to submit to her government and to take part with her in the ministry of Christ's ordinances, then we think she is bound to receive him simply in virtue of his possessing those qualifications which entitle him to be a minister of the gospel.

Were the Free Church "to act as if she were the sole church of all Christendom," and were she also to act on the principle, "that she has no right to do as she pleases," and consequently that she has no right to refuse any minister or any candidate for ordination, unless she can show cause for so doing from the Word of God, she could not, we think, make a subscription of the Confession of Faith, in all its articles, a qualification for the office of the ministry within her pale. For, were she the sole church of Christendom, and were she to require that test, she would, without all question, preclude from the sacred office many who might be fully qualified to discharge its functions. And as the matter now stands, is there not reason to fear that not a few who receive ordination, knowing that such a test is the requisite condition, append their subscription without due consideration; or, if they have doubts and scruples, may perhaps want the conscience or the courage to state them, and propose a simplification of the test? The same remark applies to the Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Secession; for, were they in the circumstances supposed, and were they acting on the principles referred to, they could not make their testimonies terms of ministerial communion, because they would find that they had no warrant from the Word of God for so doing.

The test for ministers must be much more comprehen-

sive and simple than any of the testimonies referred to, or even the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The following passage from Vinet, quoted by his translator in the introduction to his *Vital Christianity*, contains much truth, and is fitted to suggest correct feeling on this subject. "I believe," says this profound and philosophic writer, "I am not mistaken in saying that among those who speak or write on divine things, there is an exaggerated craving for uniformity. I know, indeed, that community of convictions and hopes, the habit of deriving instruction from the same sources, the intimate nature of the relations that subsist in Christian society, must have produced, as their result, a unity of thoughts, of intellectual habits, and even, to a certain extent, of expression ; but while we ought to admire this unity when it is produced, we ought to make no effort to produce it. The generous freedom of Christianity is repugnant to that timid deference for a conventional language and a vain orthodoxy of tone and style ; nor does sincerity permit us to adopt, as an expression of our individuality, a common type, the imprint of which is always in some degree foreign to us. The interests of our religious development demand that we should not conceal from ourselves our real condition ; and nothing would be more fitted to conceal it from ourselves than the involuntary habit of disguising it to others. In fine, the beauty of the evangelical work, and even unity itself, demand that each nature should manifest itself with its own characteristics. Confidence is felt in unity, when it produces itself under an aspect of variety ; community of principle is rendered more striking by diversity of forms ; while uniformity, being necessarily artificial, is always more or less suspected, and involuntarily suggests the idea of constraint or dissimulation."



In this extract, Vinet may be supposed to refer chiefly to warrantable and useful variety as to style, phraseology, and modes of statement and illustration, in preaching, and in writing on divine subjects. But it embodies a principle which is calculated to modify and simplify terms of ministerial communion, so as at once to secure substantial unity on the fundamental principles of Christianity, and to allow diversity of views and modes of statements on the more minute ramifications and details.

In framing a test for ministers, two extremes must be avoided. It must not, on the one hand, be so general and vague as to give no security for a sound evangelical and scriptural ministry; and, on the other, it must not be too numerous in its articles, or too complicated and minute in its statements on the details of the Christian system, as in this case it must always produce scruples and hesitation, and not unfrequently exclude some who are fully entitled, on the principles of God's Word, to be invested with the sacred office; while, at the same time, not a few may be induced to take the prescribed test without perhaps fully examining and perfectly approving of all its articles and statements; and every thing of this kind must always have an injurious influence on the conscience.

To frame such a test might be found to be a matter of no small difficulty and delicacy. Nevertheless, were the churches to enter on this subject humbly and honestly, and with earnest prayer to God, we have every reason to believe that, by his divine guidance and blessing, they would be brought to agree on such a test as would effect a far greater amount of unity than is at present realised, and, at the same time, secure a sound evangelical ministry. As the Head of the church has given clear instructions as

to whom she is to admit to her membership, so He has given equally clear and definite instructions as to whom she is to entrust with the ministry of the gospel.

The question of ministerial qualifications being essential to the existence and operations of the church, is one which every church has decided for itself. Hence, in every section of the church, there are terms on which candidates are admitted to the sacred office. The Reformed Presbyterians make their Testimony, and the Original Seceders make theirs, and the Free Church makes the Westminster Confession of Faith, the term of ministerial communion. But it may be asked, Are these warrantable terms of communion? These tests were framed and adopted at a time when the ideas of men were perhaps too high and stringent in regard to tests of every kind; and when the principles of civil, and also of *ecclesiastical* liberty (*i.e.*, liberty allowed by and enjoyed in the church), were not well understood. And it may be dutiful and wholesome to bring these tests to the standard of Scripture, and to inquire whether we are not called upon by the Head of the church to drop the peculiarities of each, and, from the grand principles that are common to them all, to form a test sufficient to secure an evangelical ministry. As those who are qualified to be members ought to be admitted in every portion and section of the church; so those who are qualified to be ministers should simply, on the ground of these qualifications, be received and employed by any portion of the church to which they may apply.

We would here propose questions in regard to the admission of ministers, similar to those which we have already prescribed in regard to the admission of members. We would ask, Have the Reformed Presbyterians

the authority and warrant of the Head of the church to preclude from the office of the ministry with them all the ministers of Christ, and all who are qualified to receive ordination, except those who coincide with them in their sentiments about the British Government?

Again: Have the Original Seceders the authority and warrant of the Head of the church to preclude from the office of the ministry with them all the ministers of Christ, and all candidates for ordination, except those who agree with them in their views of national establishments and of the covenants?

And again: Has the Free Church the authority and warrant of the Head of the church to preclude from the office of the ministry within her pale all the ministers of Christ, and all candidates for ordination, except those who can subscribe the Confession of Faith in all its articles, including, of course, the 20th and 23d chapters?

On what do the Reformed Presbyterian ministers found their title to be ministers of Christ? Not on the peculiarities of their Testimony; for they surely regard the ministers of other bodies, who do not hold their principles, as being as really ministers of Christ as they themselves are. On what do the ministers of the Original Secession found their title to be ministers of Christ? Not on the peculiarities of their Testimony; for they regard the ministers of other bodies, who do not hold these peculiarities, as being as really ministers of Christ as they themselves are. On what does the title of the Free Church ministers rest? Not on their having subscribed the 20th and 23d chapters of the Confession of Faith; for they hold the ministers of other bodies, who cannot subscribe these chapters, as being as really ministers of Christ as they themselves are.

Have the Reformed Presbyterian ministers received a special commission from the Head of the church to enclose themselves within the wall of their Testimony, and to hold no ecclesiastical and ministerial communion with any ministers of the gospel but themselves? If they have received such a special commission, where is it to be found? We may surely ask them to produce it. Have the Original Seceders a similar and special commission? Let them produce it. Has the Free Church such a commission? Let it be exhibited. Why are these three bodies and the United Presbyterians all in a state of disunion where there is no *practical* ground of separation?

All these bodies must either unite, or show cause why they do not unite, or then lie justly under the charge of sectarianism. Let the Reformed Presbyterians say, "We hold certain peculiar principles, and believing these to be important Bible principles, we feel ourselves warranted and commanded by the Head of the church to make them terms of communion, Christian and ministerial, and thus grounds of separation; and consequently we are warranted to unite with other Christians and ministers, only on the condition that they adopt our peculiar principles, and act upon them as we do, by making them terms of ecclesiastical fellowship. We feel ourselves bound to say to other churches, It is not enough that you do not require us to adopt your peculiarities. We cannot unite with you unless you adopt ours; and we found our warrant for making this demand on the following premises and process of reasoning."

Here let the Reformed Presbyterians lay down the premises and exhibit the steps by which they rise from

the axiomatic principles, legitimately and logically, up to the position which they profess to hold.

And let the Original Seceders make the same announcement, and let them state the grounds and exhibit the reasoning by which they defend it.

And let the Free Church say, "We hold principles by which we are distinguished from the United Presbyterians, and believing them to be important Bible principles, we cannot incorporate with the United Presbyterians unless they adopt these principles; and we make our peculiar principles grounds of separation for the following reasons."

Here let the Free Church state the reasons why she cannot incorporate with the United Presbyterians.

If these parties cannot justify their separation, let them be candid enough to make the acknowledgment, and let them all forthwith incorporate on the grand principles which they all hold in common.

In asking our brethren in all these bodies to examine their position, and on discovering it to be untenable, to make the confession, we are asking them to do no more than we ourselves have done. At one time, we held the grounds of separation to be perfectly valid; but after long and patient examination, we have come to the conclusion that it is unwarrantable and sinful to make our peculiar principles grounds of division.

We believe that the principles of the constitution of the Christian church are of a character so simple and comprehensive, as fully to warrant and imperatively to demand that the four bodies to which such frequent reference has been made, should all incorporate on that form of government and on those grand principles of the gospel on which they are all already united; while

each party is to be understood as having perfect freedom to endeavour, by the force and clearness of their reasoning, to bring the whole church to embrace their peculiar principles, but never to impose them as terms of communion and grounds of separation.

The logic of the argument may be expressed by the subjoined formula :—

B holds opinions which A regards as being so thoroughly unscriptural and unchristian, that he believes the man who holds them to have no right to be a member of the church of Christ. Therefore, A can hold no ecclesiastical fellowship with B simply on account of the character of B's opinions.

C holds opinions which A thinks incorrect and unscriptural, but not such as to be a ground of exclusion from the church of Christ. But C demands, as the condition of their union, that A shall adopt and profess these opinions. Therefore A cannot unite with C, not because he regards C as unworthy of membership in the church of Christ, but because C requires, in order to union, that A adopt and profess opinions which he believes to be unsound.

D holds opinions which A thinks incorrect and unscriptural, but not such as to be a ground of exclusion from the church of Christ. And D does not demand, as a condition of union, that A adopt his peculiar opinions. Therefore A feels himself bound by the authority of Christ to unite with D on their common principles, notwithstanding that D holds peculiar opinions which he cannot adopt and profess.

Diversity of opinion on important matters do exist, and will in all likelihood continue to exist, more or less, among the ministers and members of Christ's church.

The question is, how are we to treat these differences? To treat them in the way we have been doing, by making them grounds of division, is, we think, most unwarrantable and sinful. To treat them as we propose is, we feel persuaded, perfectly warrantable and scriptural. It is, we believe, the appointment of the Head of the church that we live in love and in all acts of ecclesiastical fellowship with all his professing people, notwithstanding diversity of opinion and practice in relation to many subjects, whenever these two conditions exist:—*First*, When the opinions and actions of our brethren do not, in our estimation, render them unworthy of membership in the church of Christ. And, *Secondly*, When by our union we are not personally obliged to profess opinions which we regard as unsound, or to perform acts which we deem to be sinful.

We must not unnecessarily separate from our fellow-Christians under the mistaken idea of being witnesses for the truth, and for the purpose, as some imagine, of benefiting our erring brethren. We must not do evil that good may come. We must not subvert the constitution of the church of Christ, and violate his express command, under the pretext or delusion of maintaining his truth and cause.

When we have proposed our plan of uniting all these bodies on their common principles, with full liberty for the several parties to defend and disseminate their peculiar sentiments, we have been met with this objection,—that such a union would be productive of interminable confusion. Now, we think that this objection is made without due consideration, and that there is no real ground for the alarm. No man apprehends any serious convulsions in the solar system from the diversity as to

bulk and density which exist among the planets. These, no doubt, disturb one another slightly as they move in their orbits, but, as long as the two grand forces, the centrifugal and the centripetal, continue to act, with undiminished and invariable power, we may rest assured that the harmony of the spheres will sustain no very great or injurious interruption. In like manner, were the two grand doctrines of Christianity—that of the salvation of the guilty on the ground of the atonement and righteousness of Emmanuel, and that of the sovereign influences of the Spirit in applying the work of the Saviour to the soul—to exert their powerful and appropriate influence (which, alas! they do not) on all who profess to believe them, differences about other matters would be conducted in the most calm, candid, and Christian spirit.

“These diversities of opinion,” says Isaac Taylor, “by no means necessarily involve virulent or acrimonious sentiments. Sad, indeed, would it be if Christian amity and that true unison of hearts and hands which the church should exhibit, could not be hoped for until an absolute uniformity of notions and practices is brought about; for it is plain that so long as one mind possesses more native power and more accomplishments than another, there must be inequalities of knowledge and varieties of apprehension. Nor, in fact, are such differences ever found to throw a cloud over private friendships, or to disturb the harmony of general society, while angry aggravations and the swellings of wounded pride are avoided.”

The truth of the observation at the close of this extract, all must surely have experienced. We have many dear friends in all the bodies referred to, as well as in others, and especially among the ministers, with all of



whom we hold much pleasant and profitable intercourse. We may occasionally discuss and argue on our points of difference ; we may do so at times with energy—never, we trust, with ill-nature ;—but when we enter seriously, in our conversations, on the person and work of the Redeemer—on salvation through his blood—on the office and operations of the Spirit—on the consolations of the gospel under personal and domestic affliction, and on the hopes and the joys of heaven, slight indeed are the perturbations occasioned by our points of difference, of what kind soever these may be. And if this can be done by eight or ten, why not by eight or ten hundred, or by eight or ten thousand ; and if it can be done in private, why may it not be done also in public ?

Though our Reformed Presbyterian brethren, or any of our brethren, should, with all the logic which they could command, endeavour to refute all our peculiar opinions, and though we should remain unconvinced, this need occasion no disturbance to the soul, when we are seated together at the Redeemer's table, or when we are dispensing together the ordinances of his grace. Let intelligent and candid men but seriously consider the matter, and they will find that it is a complete mistake to suppose that our differences must necessarily interrupt our Christian communion.

When propounding our plan of union, some have readily admitted that it might do admirably well, provided we could get the several parties to act upon it. But if our divisions cannot be defended on the grounds of Scripture and reason, and if their continuance is rendered necessary only by our bad temper, this is certainly a most humiliating confession for the disciples of Christ to be obliged to make. But the truth is, that the proper

style and spirit of conducting controversy in general, and especially religious controversy, is an attainment which we have yet in a great measure to acquire. We are told by a high authority, that "arguments do not, like cannon-balls, do more execution by being made red hot." This, however, seems to be a recent discovery. But the fact, however true and obvious when announced, does not appear to have been known to our ancestors; for whatever was the occasion or the subject of dispute, whether the authority of the Samaritan Pentateuch, or the antiquity of the Hebrew punctuation, or the sublime mysteries at issue between Calvinists and Arminians, or the comparative merits of the several forms of church government, or the disputes between the Cameronians and the Seceders, or those between the Burghers and Antiburghers,—the combatants seem to have thought it essentially necessary to launch their arguments at one another in the highest state of exandescency, and thus to render the whole atmosphere of the controversy as perturbed and noisy as possible, and often as impervious to the light as

"The war-cloud rolling dun,  
Where furious Frank and fiery Hun  
Shout 'mid their sulphurous canopy."

And though the horrors and barbarities of ancient warfare have been somewhat softened in modern times, yet even the spirit in which the recent controversies in our own country were conducted was highly reprehensible.

We have not yet completely acquired the habit of "forbearing one another in love," and of "speaking the truth in love"—a habit which it may demand no small time to effect and exercise to mature. "Much training," it has been said, "is necessary before we can listen

with patience, or even behave with civility, to those who dissent from our settled opinions upon any subject. Our own opinions we of course presume to be right, and from long familiarity we conceive them to be evident, so that we naturally ascribe all dissent from them to weakness or perversity—but rather to perversity than weakness. Besides, it is irksome to change our habits of thinking, and he who applies his arguments to destroy the sentiments which nature or education has woven into our constitution, not only requires us to submit to a harsh operation, but also, which is incomparably worse, he mortifies our self-conceit.”

We ought, therefore, to subject ourselves forthwith to this needful training, and habituate ourselves to this exercise of self-denial. Again, it has been said, “The maladies of the mind are not to be healed, any more than those of the body, unless by a friendly hand.” We must, therefore, learn to treat one another gently and kindly; while we are endeavouring to rectify the errors of the judgment, or the fallacies of the reason, we must combine with faith, and fortitude, and knowledge, temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity. All the Christian graces must be tried by constant and hard exercise. Faith must be tested, patience must have its perfect work, and meekness, and gentleness, and courteousness, must all be cultivated by unremitted and vigorous exercise. And this may be one reason, among many others, why God permits his dear children, and his most honoured and distinguished saints and servants, to differ in their judgment on a great variety of subjects connected with religion—that they may cultivate mutual forbearance, and patience, and kindness, in their joint investigation of the truth.

Even when defending the foundations of our faith against the most violent and virulent of its adversaries, we ought to maintain that calm and holy dignity which so well becomes the advocates of a religion whose doctrines, while illustrating the glory of God in the highest, breathe peace and goodwill toward men on earth. Such a spirit is recommended by the highest authority and by the most sublime examples. The apostle Jude tells us that Michael the archangel, when disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation. Durst not ! Why ? Did the archangel indeed quail beneath the dark and malignant scowl of the fiend ? No ; for malignant and potent too, as he well knew him to be, he knew that he was more than a match for him. But he felt the most profound and solemn awe of the august Presence before whom the contest was conducted. And, besides, he felt that it would be most unseemly and altogether incongruous to indulge in railing and vituperation when contending about the body of one who, while living, was the meekest of all men on the face of the earth.

But if we are to maintain the spirit of the gospel in all our controversies even with its enemies, how much more in any disputes that may arise between us and our brethren ! Nothing is more repeatedly and urgently enjoined on Christians both by our Lord and his apostles than the cultivation of such a spirit. The following sentences on this subject, in a short essay on Christian Union in the "Hours of Thought," are so appropriate, that we shall make no apology for their introduction :—  
" Another thing which appears indispensable to Christian union is,—that all religious and ecclesiastical discussions be conducted in a spirit of meekness and love.

It is not from a calm statement or defence of opinions that evil results, but from the unchristian spirit in which they are too often stated and defended. The great cause of the evils of controversy is the want of Christian brotherly love. If all religious and ecclesiastical discussions were conducted in a spirit of serious inquiry after truth, and in a spirit of brotherly love and mutual forbearance free from all satire, heat, and acrimony, how happy might the consequences be. It may be laid down as a general rule, that when argument is mixed up with satire, the satire neutralizes the effect of the argument on an opponent, even though that argument be really powerful; therefore, though 'railing' and 'evil speaking' were not opposed to the spirit of Christianity, indulgence in them is the most effectual way to prevent conviction."

It is with much pleasure that we also quote the following passage from the sermon delivered by Dr William Symington at the opening of the Bicentenary:—"Let us follow the leadings of Providence. Let us, like the sons of Issachar, be men of understanding, to know the times and what Israel ought to do. Rising above the little jealousies of sectarian rivalry, laying aside all personal asperities, let us show a willingness to meet on the arena of frank and friendly consultation brethren of other churches, and to discuss with them our points of difference in a spirit of Christian candour and charity. The friends of the Redeemer are not always to be separated and divided. The reign of disunion is not to be for ever. 'There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all. There is one body and one Spirit.' And, believing that these statements of sacred writ are des-

tined to receive a *visible* as well as an *invisible* fulfilment, we must hold Christians bound to use all lawful means for bringing this about. Surely it is more to be desired that the churches of the Reformation, acting like rational and moral creatures, should take steps to unite on a basis of truth, by the scriptural use of consultation, explanation, advice, discussion, and prayer, than that, like insensate masses, they should wait to be melted by the fire, and welded together by the hammer of divine judgments. May the present commemorative services be blessed of God for leading to movements that shall issue in putting an end to existing dissensions and divisions ! and may each of us feel himself under obligation, in order to this, to crucify and repress the spirit of party strife ; to feed the flame of that sacred affection which many waters cannot quench ; to take to his heart in fraternal embrace all who love the Lord Jesus ; to converse closely and oft with those predictions which foretell coming days of unity and peace ; and to drink deeply into the spirit of the prayer, ‘ that they all may be one as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ! ’ ”

Let us all, therefore, unite on the broad and stable basis of our common Christianity, and let us, with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, investigate together the points of dispute ; and perhaps God may be pleased to bring us to see eye to eye, even on these. But though we should continue to take somewhat different views of these matters throughout the whole of that period, during which we see but in part, and prophesy but in part, our differences may merely afford the more abundant opportunities for the exercise of that charity which never faileth, and which shall abide,

when prophecies, and tongues, and knowledge, shall have vanished away.

Let the several parties come, each out of its own *den*, which, as Lord Bacon says, “breaks and corrupts the light,” and has often the strange and pernicious effect of diminishing what is great, and of magnifying what is small. Let all come out, and view in the broad and clear light of heaven, the matters on which they agree, and the matters on which they differ; and with these in their true relative magnitudes fully and distinctly before their eyes, we ask them to say, Shall those who have been washed in the same atoning blood, and clothed in the same justifying righteousness, and regenerated, and sanctified by the same Divine Spirit, and are fellow-heirs of the same incorruptible and unfading inheritance, and fellow-travellers to the same heaven, and are, moreover, fellow-labourers in the same work of the same Divine Master—shall those who are united by bonds so numerous, so holy, and so indissoluble as these, divide and arrange themselves into rival sects, because some of them think that the British Government is the ordinance of God for the administration of justice, and others (while “practising a quiet and peaceable submission in all matters where sin is not commanded”) hesitate to recognise it in this light? or, because some regard the deed by which our ancestors confederated to obtain civil and religious freedom, and to effect the union of the churches, as continuing to be of formal obligation from age to age, whereas others, while prosecuting the great objects of the confederation, entertain doubts of the permanent obligation of the instrument? or, because some think there may and ought to be civil establishments of religion, and others think there ought not?

Is it not most wonderful that the Christian mind should have been led "so preposterously to err, as to form mere differences of opinion on the subjects specified, into centres of attraction, and that these should have all severally been able to draw off and collect around them parties of a holy brotherhood, which God had united by the most potent of all conceivable principles of cohesion. Isaac Taylor, who has given us the natural history of various forms of false thinking and feeling in religion, has touched also on the philosophy of this error, in No. 20 of "Saturday Evening," entitled, *Charity and Conscience*; and also in "Fanaticism," sect. 8, "Fanaticism of the Symbol." The study of these essays might, we think, contribute to disentangle and rectify the judgment in relation to the grounds of disunion among the churches. The prejudices of certain parties, on this subject, are so strong and inveterate, that they can be removed only by a patient, and careful, and candid investigation. Ministers are most unfavourably situated for making a disinterested inquiry. They are led to embrace the principles of their profession, often before they have had time maturely to examine them; and they become solemnly pledged to these principles at their admission to the church, and especially at license and ordination; and their interests and personal friendships, as well as their consistency, are all bound up with the body to which they belong; so that it is no easy matter to re-examine their principles with an unbiassed mind, and with a resolution to embrace the truth when discovered, though at the expense of all these considerations.

There is, moreover, a sort of indolent Popish faith with which we are all, more or less, infected—a dispo-



sition to believe as our fathers believed, and as we ourselves have hitherto believed. In No. 12 of "Saturday Evening," Isaac Taylor enumerates some of the prominent evils that have developed themselves in the Christian church, and among these he includes "sectarian or factious sociality." Now, this is the particular sin with which, as parties, we stand chargeable. There are many, whom we believe to be very worthy persons, who feel that, in their respective churches, they are enjoying the means of grace, and the consolations of religion, and that they are also aiding, so far, the great objects of Christian charity and missionary enterprise. And hence they are quite content to remain as they are, and they feel no great necessity for the union of the different sections of the church. Now, while this state of feeling may be connected with much quiet piety, and goodness, and Christian benevolence, it is at the same time combined with selfishness and indifference to an object that lies near the heart of the Redeemer. Let us rise above such a spirit. Let us open our eyes to the evil of division, to its great sinfulness, and to its practical mischiefs. Let us cultivate a deep sense of the duty of union, and of its blessed influence both on personal and social religion. Let us resist with all our might, in dependence on the grace of God, those party prejudices which have "grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength." Let us subject our hearts and consciences to the will and law of the Redeemer. And let us pray the Holy Spirit so to elevate and expand our minds, that we shall be able to grasp those grand and comprehensive principles of Christian fellowship so clearly stated, and so fully exemplified in the New Testament. In order that the prophet might be

enabled to view the church, in all her extent, glory, and symmetry, it was necessary that he should "be carried away in the Spirit to a *great and high mountain*." The evil with us is, that, as parties, we are all located severally in so many low and narrow defiles, so that we can only obtain a view of a part of the great city, the holy Jerusalem. One from his defile sees only one of the foundations, and he sees it to be a jasper, and he maintains that the whole foundation is one jasper. Another sees another of the foundations, and he sees it to be a sapphire, and he maintains that the whole is one sapphire, and so on. And they dispute about their different views, and they enter on subtle philosophical disquisitions, and they stoutly deny the possibility of blending, in one harmonious and perfect blaze of light and glory, all the rays of all the gems. We shall never be able, then, to see fully and distinctly "the frame of the city," until we are "set upon a very high mountain." We must walk round the whole circuit of Zion, before we can tell her towers, mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces.

We shall now leave all our statements, arguments, and appeals, to the candid and serious consideration of the parties concerned; while we would earnestly invite those who are far better qualified by their talents, experience, and influence, than we feel ourselves to be, to take up and prosecute the subject. Earnestly, indeed, do we desire and pray, that some far more powerful voice than ours were lifted up to plead this sacred cause. Some of the master spirits who contributed so eminently to bring about the Disruption, have been called to their rest. But others of them still remain. And we would humbly, and with all respect, ask them to inquire, what

is the next great work in which their Master is calling them to engage. They have, by his divine blessing, effected the separation of the church from the state, when it was clearly seen, that such a disunion was absolutely necessary for her health and efficiency. But they have not yet finished their mission. The Disruption, however great a work, was a mere preliminary to those ulterior and more glorious objects, which the Head of the church is evidently about to accomplish. And the union of all free churches is undoubtedly one of these objects.

The church of the Disruption assumed the noble designation of the **FREE CHURCH**. We blame her not; we highly commend her for so doing. The title was as happy and appropriate as it was justly merited. But we would, with all deference, remind her that there are other free churches besides her in Scotland; and that these had enjoyed all the blessings of freedom long before she effected her emancipation. Are not all free-men brethren? Common freedom is one of the strongest bonds of union; and its strength is vastly augmented when sanctified by religion. Why should not all free churches be **ONE FREE CHURCH**? An enslaved church can make no farther movement towards union than the length of her chain, but free churches can meet at will and cordially embrace; and in the embrace, each of the sisters has the supreme satisfaction of feeling that, while free herself, she presses to her bosom one who is free also.

Let all, then, without farther delay, enter with honesty, energy, and zeal on the great work of uniting the churches. In all the four free Presbyterian churches, there are men of high talent, possessed of extensive influence, and devoted to the service of their common

**Lord.** Were these men cordially to take this matter in hand, consecrate to it all their abilities and influence, and persevere in it unweariedly, it would not be long in being accomplished.

There has been one glorious movement in the right direction—the Disruption in 1843 ; and why should that not be succeeded by another measure still more glorious—the union of all the free Presbyterian churches in Scotland in 1853 ?

## APPENDIX.

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### NO. I.—EXTRACT FROM HOWE'S PREFACE TO HIS SER- MONS ON THE "CARNALITY OF RELIGIOUS CONTENTIONS."

"I would now adventure to offer these things to serious consideration. *First*, Whether for any party to make unto itself other limits of communion than Christ hath made, and hedge up itself within those limits, excluding those whom Christ would admit, and admitting those whom he would exclude, be not in itself a real sin? They have a holy table; I would ask whose table this is? is it the table of this or that man, or party of men, or is it the Lord's table? *Second*, If this be a sin, is it not a heinous one? *Third*, But if we suppose it a sin, and a heinous one, how far doth the guilt of it spread? How few among the several sects and parties of Christians are innocent, if the measures of their several communions were brought under just and severe examination?"

Dr Urwick, who writes the life prefixed to the volume of Howe, published by Nelson in his "Works of the English Puritan Divines," justly remarks: "Howe's sermon on union has been well chosen for republication. Nothing from Howe or any other man could have been selected, more excellent, or more opportune, for the movement so happily begun towards openly recognising the union already—and always—existing among real Christians. The visible union contended for by Howe, and to be sought by us, is a union without compro-

mise of differing opinions among its members—a union in which full scope is to be given for ‘*exhorting* one another,’ though not for *judging* one another,—for ‘*speaking the truth*,’ wide as our convictions may extend, with no other restriction than that it be done ‘in love.’ ”

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NO. II.—ANECDOTE OF THE LATE DR M’CRIE.

In former years, the dissenting ministers in Edinburgh dined together annually, for the purpose of cultivating Christian friendship. I happened to be in Dr M’Crie’s house, on one occasion (it may be about 30 years ago), when he returned from one of these annual dinners; and in conversation on the subject, I remember most distinctly his saying, “I could, with the greatest delight, sit down next Sabbath at the Lord’s table with all my brethren with whom I have dined to-day, provided the public grounds were removed.” This declaration was certainly equally honourable to the Christian feelings of Dr M’Crie and to the character of his brethren. But the saying perhaps implied more than Dr M’Crie was distinctly aware of when he gave utterance to it. What did he mean by the “public grounds being removed?” He certainly did not mean to say, provided his brethren were entitled to a seat at the Lord’s table; for he could have said of the greatest and most abandoned sinners in Edinburgh, that, provided they were washed and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God, he could sit down with them at the Lord’s table. Dr M’Crie undoubtedly meant to say that he regarded his brethren as being on that very day fully entitled to a seat at the Lord’s table. Why should not those brethren, seeing all of them were entitled to the communion ordinance, have enjoyed it together, simply on the ground which gave them their title? We know well what Dr M’Crie meant. He

meant, provided all his brethren should be brought to adopt and act upon his peculiar opinions. But each of them might have said the same thing. Perhaps they did. We know at any rate that some of them would have expressed themselves exactly in the way Dr McCrie did. Is there not some serious error and confusion in our views of communion? The dictates of the denominational judgment are not in harmony with the catholic feelings of the heart.

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NO. III.—NOTE ON PAGES 49 AND 50.

I do not mean to say, that provided the Premillenarians were to become the majority, it would be necessary or expedient for them to assert their doctrine by an act of the supreme court. I merely say that it would be lawful for them to do so; and that this is all the length they would be warranted to go. I selected the question merely for the purpose of illustrating the mode in which, I think, many questions and controversies should be treated. I could have taken any other question, such as the obligation of the Covenants. But I made choice of the one referred to, because it is a question that has not been judicially asserted, far less made a term of communion, in any church. All I meant to say was—provided the premillenarians were the majority, and provided they felt it to be their duty so to assert their doctrine, they would, by the constitution of the church, have a perfect right to do so. The expediency of using the right is another matter.

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## NO. IV.—ON THE APHORISM, "CO-OPERATION WITHOUT INCORPORATION."

This aphorism has been attributed to Dr Chalmers. But, "goodly and well-sounding" as it is, Dr Chalmers has expressed his dissatisfaction with it. "It is not," he says, in his address at the Bicentenary, "just the motto that I would inscribe upon an escutcheon wherewith to signalize my family. I have no quarrel with the co-operation; and whenever aught that is good is expedited thereby, the more of it the better. But I except to the negative as being by far too absolute that is laid by this maxim on the incorporation. The truth is, that whenever incorporation can be effected with advantage, and without violence to the consciences of the parties, it is in itself a most desirable object; and therefore, without saying, roundly and universally, 'co-operation without incorporation,' I would, though at the hazard of marring somewhat the euphony of the saying, and of laying an arrest on its way towards the rank and celebrity of a proverb,—I would substitute for those words, 'Co-operation now, and this with the view, as soon as may be, to incorporation afterwards.'"

I would venture to change even this last form of the aphorism, and make it run thus, "Immediate incorporation to as great an extent as practicable, and co-operation where incorporation cannot be effected."

It must be evident that the plan of union proposed in the foregoing essay, is not to be identified with the scheme of free communion, advocated by the late Dr Mason and others.

There are some excellent observations on the vast importance of incorporate unity in a pamphlet published some years ago by James Nisbet and Co., London, entitled, "Sectarianism the bane of religion and the church, and the necessity of an immediate movement towards



unity." I shall quote a sentence or two from section 5th, on "*what* unity ought to be attempted:"—

"As a remedy for the evils of division, it has been proposed that we should aim at the cultivation of mutual affection and confidence, so far as to secure co-operation without incorporation; the external differences which separate Christian denominations remaining as they are. It is a sad proof of the inveteracy of our divisions, that it should be thus seriously proposed to cease from regarding them as curable, and content ourselves with an attempt to abate, repress, or conceal their more painful and loathsome symptoms; that we should pretend to annihilate the evil by solemnly legalizing it."

"Peace, it is admitted readily, is not inconsistent with very considerable diversities of opinion, but all experience forbids our believing it to be secure with these differences embodied in the form of sects. It is our denominational organization, the ready-made and marshalled and disciplined armies of opposite opinion, each bound together by feelings and interests more or less carnal, which render it impossible that Christians can co-operate fully, cordially, and effectually, as the servants and soldiers of Christ; and these separate and conflicting organizations are not more the effect, than they are the perpetuating cause, of misunderstanding, jealousy, and strife. They must be dissolved and blended together, or divested of their more salient differences, and bound together by some definite bond, ere we can have a lasting or useful peace. There may be, it is granted, temporary combinations for good, as there may be for worldly ends, between those who set out with the principle that they need be united only so far as they please, and who recognise no authority superior to their own will, or views of expediency, as enjoining any thing further. There *may* be occasional alliances, as there are among the kingdoms of this world. But what would have been the history of the island of Great Britain during the last two centuries, if the two nations which

inhabit it, instead of being united under one sovereign in 1603, and under one legislature in 1707, had been bound by the loose tie of a simple treaty of peace, or a temporary league of offence or defence? It would have been what that of France and England has been during the same years—a succession of periods of peace, ever and anon interrupted by fierce warfare. In like manner, there may be temporary combinations, but there can be no annihilation of distrust, no firmly-established confidence, no security for co-operation in great and effective Christian enterprises, until the only distinction known amongst us, is that of the church on the one hand, and the world on the other; until our Protestant sects are fused or combined into one; and the church of Christ, no longer casting her light upon the surrounding darkness, like the scattered and twinkling stars, shall come forth, ‘fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible’ as a disciplined and bannered army. It may be an improvement in the present state of things, nay, it may be hailed as an important and hopeful preliminary to something more practical and durable, to have an armistice or a truce, or a confederation; but let it be borne in mind, that for the effectual subjugation of the world to the truth, we require, not a truce, but a union; and that the church of Christ is, not a confederation, but a kingdom.”

THE END.

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